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POLITICS AND LITERATURE

G. D. H. COLE

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POLITICS AND LITERATURE

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POLITICS AND LITERATURE

G. D. H. COLE

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POLITICS AND LITERATURE

I

INTRODUCTORY

All literature is made up of two elements—form and content ; and in all great literature the two are inseparable. It will not do to study first the one and then the other, appraising your author's quality in each apart, and then putting the two together to make up a composite judgment. That way the essential character of the work escapes. You get a judgment on your author's craftsmanship, and on his intellect or his emotion, or his power of visualisation, or his dramatic sense. But you get no judgment on his real quality as a literary artist.

Form and content lie obviously closest together in poetry, when they are made one flesh. Nothing can be learnt about a lyric poem at any rate by studying either its form or its content apart—nothing, that is, that contributes to a fuller appreciation of its quality. There may be, it is true, a purely technical study of the rhyme scheme of a sonnet, or the metrical structure of a Greek chorus ;

and this study may be useful to poets, and profitable to professors. But it carries one no nearer the appreciation of the poem. The words—their sound and rhythm as well as their sense and association—are the poem. Sense and sound have no life apart. Nothing survives of a lyric poem in a prose paraphrase, and little enough in a translation. And an arrangement of beautiful but meaningless words does not make a poem : else were Swinburne, perhaps, the greatest of the poets.

In other sorts of poetry, and in most prose, the connection between form and content is not quite so close as this. Dramatic and epic poetry have a story, didactic poetry a moral, nature poetry a quality of observation, that can be considered apart from their form. And, in some degree, their form can be considered apart from their content in something more than a purely technical sense. In prose, the disjunction commonly goes somewhat further. For men are most moved to write poetry when an emotional experience most completely fuses form and content in their minds. They turn to prose rather in their cooler moments, when they have something to say, and are seeking the means of saying it clearly and well.

The literature that deals with politics, and especially the literature of political theory, is apt to exhibit this disjunction in its most extreme form. For the more purely intellectual the content of literature becomes, the more separable it is from its

form. Yet, even here, it remains true that, in the case of all good writers, the thought loses a great deal of its quality by being severed from their expression of it, while the virtue of their style cannot be understood without reference to the nature of the thought which it conveys. Appropriateness is one of the chief stylistic virtues ; and this essentially involves a relation to the content that is to be expressed.

The history of English political ideas has been studied in many books ; and histories of English literature are as the sands in number. But I know of no book that is about political literature as literature—no book that studies the ideas of English political writers not only as ideas, but in relation to their literary form and flavour as well. That, however, is the aim of this essay—to write not a history of political thought or of political styles, but a brief introductory study of political literature in its double aspect of form and content together.

Pray observe that I have not said I shall concern myself with form rather than with ideas, but with ideas in the form of their expression. This is not a technical essay on a particular kind of literary craftsmanship, but a study of a particular kind of literature—that is, of form and content together. And content is bound to bulk large ; for the first aim of nearly all political literature is to get something said, and only the second aim to say it well.

In political writing, as a rule, content not only counts, but also weighs. The political writer may, like Burke, appeal strongly to the emotions ; but he must usually also argue, and argue about facts. There is, indeed, some political literature—patriotic poetry in especial—that does not stop to argue. It only appeals, or glorifies. Shakespeare's purple patches in his historical plays are of this kind ; and there is much oratory that approaches it. But these are exceptional types. Most political literature is concerned with stating a case ; and this includes the answering of a possible opposition.

The more fully this is true, the greater is the chance that the literary quality of the political writer will go unappreciated. For books which are written primarily in order to argue a case are likely to be read for their content or not at all, except by a few technical students of the literary craft. Their style may lift up their content to a higher plane ; but it must remain secondary to their intellectual quality. And, from the standpoint of winning appreciation from lovers of good literature, their content positively stands in the way. It is deterrent, and not merely neutral. Adam Smith and David Hume are both masters of English prose style ; but they are commonly read only by persons interested in economics or philosophy, and not by literary amateurs. Even poets are apt to suffer in estimation if they are "too political," or "too theological," or the like. Milton is too big to be

belittled ; but even *Paradise Lost* as a whole is too argumentative to be popular.

If literature were appreciated purely as a craft, the political writers, though they put their ideas first and their craft second, would take in it a far higher place than is usually assigned to them. Hooker and Bacon are the fine flower of Elizabethan prose : Hobbes is the finest prose craftsman of the seventeenth century : Swift positively created anew for the modern world the craft of " polite " English ; and Burke is the most accomplished maker of emotional prose in the language. If literature were purely a craft, these men would be among its greatest. But, except Swift, who wrote of much besides politics, received opinion would not put them above the second rank.

This is not because political writing is too trivial or occasional for greatness. Politics is, indeed, often trivial ; but there is a vital difference between the trivial and the common. Much of the greatest literature is about the commonest and simplest things of life. And much of the best political literature deals with just those points at which political controversy touches these common and simple things. All great literature needs great ideas or great emotions as well as fine words ; but this greatness may be found most often in such common themes. Nor is the occasional to be identified too hastily with the trivial. Often, indeed, cause and controversy die, and the life goes out of the

words that were used to express them. But sometimes the most occasional writing wears well, despite its forgotten allusions. Cobbett is an obvious instance.

Enduring political literature has, for the most part, one of two qualities. The greatest, and the most certain of survival, is that which charges great and simple causes with the highest emotional or intellectual content, and expresses them in the most fitting and beautiful language. The Funeral Oration of Pericles, Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social*, and Plato's *Republic* are, I think, the three outstanding examples. There is nothing in English political literature that can be put beside these three ; but there is a very high level of secondary accomplishment. Milton's *Areopagitica* comes nearest.

Lacking this highest quality, political literature has the best chance of being appreciated, and of surviving as literature and not merely as historical or philosophical material, if it is highly seasoned with its author's personality. The world in general—including the literary public—values personality far above argument. Drama and novel appeal most enduringly when they preserve great thought or great emotion transmuted into individual experience. History appeals most enduringly when it is most a dramatisation of the thoughts and emotions of the past. Even the most appealing poetry is commonly a dramatic monologue. It is the poet who speaks in his verse. In comparison, most

political literature involves a high degree of abstraction, and can be rescued, in default of the power to turn the abstract into the universal (which is the prerogative of the highest), only by sheer force of personality, as in Cobbett or Swift, or more rarely, as in *Absalom and Achitophel*, by the force with which the writer re-creates the personalities whose actions are his theme. Most political writing achieves neither of these things. It is too abstract to retain as literature, when its abstractions have withered, more than the virtue of its craftsmanship alone.

English has, nevertheless, for those who choose to seek it, a great wealth of political writing. From Hooker to Bernard Shaw much of our best prose is largely political. This is natural enough. In a people so given to politics, and with so great a literary tradition, the two streams have often flowed inevitably together.

Moreover, apart from political literature in the narrower sense, much of our best writing has a largely political background. The English novel has throughout its history a rich vein of social description and criticism and satire. Beginning with Elizabethans like Deloney, this is carried on through Defoe and Fielding to Dickens and Thackeray, and, in our own day, to Wells and Galsworthy. Defoe and Fielding, far more than Samuel Richardson, are the makers of the English tradition of story-telling. Dickens is its perfection.

" Social," in this sense, and " political " are not, of course, the same. But they are akin. The *genre* element in the English novel makes it a ready instrument of purposive description, and even of propaganda. Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell, Mrs. Trollope, Kingsley—all chose descriptive themes from the new industrialism of the nineteenth century. George Eliot's novels became tracts without always ceasing to be novels. Disraeli used the novel as the means of expressing the political philosophy of " Young England." And Dickens, saved by his humour and his extraordinary power of whimsical observation from sacrificing his story to his convictions, was one of the most powerful liberating forces of the Victorian Age. Trollope was not at his best when he turned to politics ; but Samuel Butler produced, in *The Way of All Flesh*, a masterpiece which, without a word of politics proper from beginning to end, is the most searching social satire of the later nineteenth century.

English poetry, too, is redolent of politics. What Milton is to Puritanism, Pope is to the Augustan politics of the early eighteenth century, and Tennyson to the Victorian period. Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron mirror the political upheavals that followed the French Revolution as truly as Whitman expressed something vital in the spirit of expanding America. Goldsmith and Crabbe paint *genre* pictures in verse : Blake catches up politics, with all the rest of life, into his Æolus bag, whence

blow such strange and invigorating winds of freedom : and Burns redeems our literature from the reproach of having no great political songs. These, being poets and novelists, get their meed of literary praise ; but they are praised, for the most part, not without regard for their politics, but in spite of them.

Much that I have just said implies that I shall attempt no precise delimitation of my subject-matter. This essay will not confine itself to political theorists in the narrow sense, though it will lay special stress upon their work. It will include also the pamphleteers, the satirists, and the more widely " social " writers whose work has clearly a political content. I am tempted, indeed, to stray much further afield, and to include " social," as well as political, literature within my scope. But this would open the door altogether too wide ; for most literature has in some degree a recognisably social element. I must leave aside the poets of social description, such as Goldsmith and Crabbe ; the novelists who, like Fielding, sketch in a social background which is valuable gleaning for the historian, but is not directly political in its content ; the didactic writers, such as Baxter and Bunyan ; the travellers from Hakluyt and Purchas to Jonas Hanway and Arthur Young ; indeed, all those whose writings are, in this respect, rather material for the political student than political literature itself. On this wider aspect of the question before

me I can say only a few words by way of introduction.

Men need intensely the support of a society in which to live. Their most intimate doings are coloured by its quality. That is why all literature, however personal it may be, has in some degree a social background. This need not be obtruded or even consciously present at all to the mind of the artist. But, under ordinary conditions, it affects all his ideas, and permeates all his work. Whether this background looms large or small does not affect the quality of his writing ; but whether a man have a familiar social background or not does affect it.

Take the case of a writer as far removed as it is possible to imagine from the making of political literature. Few things are more startling than the sudden waning of the once great literary reputation of Henry James. A few years ago he was—not a colossus, but at least a large genius tucked away by his own magic into a very small bottle ; but nowadays he seems to be buried, bottle and all, at the bottom of the sea. As a figure of contemporary influence, he is not : *les jeunes* appear to be unconscious of his very existence.

Even when we revered James, most of us were uneasily conscious of the tenuous unsubstantiality of his world. He appeared to have no environment, save that thin cloudland of fancy that he breathed around himself. Henry James was a literary

Seriphian ; and the unreality of that tiny, closed world in which he chose to live dooms his work to be remembered only by a scanty band of literary amateurs—students of the craft of letters. Nothing can destroy the quality of his workmanship ; but the stuff on which he drew his silverpoints of imagination has melted away. His art is as short-lived as the coiffeur's, or the confectioner's. And this is due largely, I think, to his divorce from any real environment, to his being an American at home not even in Paris, but only in an evanescent fairyland of his own mind.

Another writer who is under a cloud is William Morris, who lives to-day in most men's appreciation rather as a man than as a poet. Morris and James are very different ; but they are alike in this—that they chose, in their writings, to live in an unreal world, divorced from all human passions and from all experience. This is not true of all Morris's work ; but it is true of most of his poetry, and above all of his prose romances. The beings who move through the pages of *The Earthly Paradise* have no earthly habits : the *Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon* is psychologically, as well as geographically, nowhere. Morris thought literature was one of the decorative arts, and therefore most of his writing is dead. He escaped from this obsession only when he turned from literature to face reality. His best writing—and it is very good—is in his essays and addresses on Art and

Socialism, in which he was hardly trying to write well at all, but only to say something that needed desperately to be said. No one ever praised England more to my mind than Morris when he wrote :

" The land is a little land ; too much shut up within the narrow seas, as it seems, to have much space for swelling into hugeness : there are no great wastes overwhelming in their dreariness, no great solitudes of forests, no terrible untrodden mountain-walls : all is measured, mingled, varied, gliding easily one thing into another : little rivers, little plains, swelling, speedily-changing uplands, all beset with handsome orderly trees ; little hills, little mountains, netted over with the walls of sheep-walks : all is little ; yet not foolish and blank, but serious rather, and abundant of meaning for such as choose to seek it : it is neither prison nor palace, but a decent home."

Morris, the poet, chose commonly to retreat into an unreal world whose men and women, as well as the scenery, came off tapestries, or out of illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages. But Morris the man and Morris the propagandist lived vigorously and, for the most part, happily in a real world he loved.

Of all types of literature that are on the verge of being political, it has cost me most difficulty to know whether I should include history within my scope. The period that I have chosen, running

from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth, includes in its range the great English historians—Clarendon and Burnet in the seventeenth century, Gibbon in the eighteenth, and Macaulay in the early days of the nineteenth century. Among these men history was re-born and grew up to new manhood as a literary art. But history, though it is always in a sense political, is a theme by itself. I could not have done justice to it. It falls strictly within the limits of my treatment only when the historian uses history as an instrument for the construction of a philosophy of society, as Gibbon largely did, or as the means of justifying a view of contemporary policy by a coloured appeal to the past, as Macaulay above all other historians has succeeded in doing. Obviously, the historian cannot aim consciously at making his characters act, or the course of events run, to suit his convictions or his convenience ; for what has been done stands independently of his desire. But he can interpret men and events, though he cannot make them ; and his account of the past may readily be charged by him with morals for the present. He is no mere chronicler, but interpreter and censor, of the past. That is why history is being constantly re-written in accordance with the changing ideas of different epochs and of different factions ; for each man sees the same events in a different light. And that is why history has been so often a powerful inspiration of political parties

and leaders ; for each looks for what he wants in the past, and is apt, by judicious selection and imputation of meaning, readily to find it. The historian may not consciously distort the truth ; but the most propagandist historians are least conscious of doing so, for they are surest that truth is all on their side.

Macaulay wrote Whig history, and wrote it in part with the conscious object of arming the Whig party with powerful historical sanctions. But this is a criticism of Macaulay only in so far as he actually distorted history to fit his purpose. He was so certain that Truth was a Whig that he could hardly have written differently, even if he had been wholly without a propagandist aim. Men do not keep their contemplation of truth, as they see it, in one part of their minds, and the furtherance of their beliefs in another. Their practical beliefs arise out of their vision of the truth, and are inseparable from it. History therefore turns perpetually to preaching, when it is not mere grubbing up of facts for others to hang texts on. There is no such thing as absolute truth in historical interpretation.

Historians point their narrative with a moral ; and politicians love to reinforce their precepts with historical illustration. Macaulay thought that history proved the Whigs were always right, whereas Burke, fearing they might go wrong, called in the Old Whigs to redress the balance

of the New. Macaulay's *History* is a Whig tract : Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* are an appeal to historical tradition. On the historian's work are plainly stamped the controversies of his own day : the pamphleteer flies to history in order to escape from the limitations of the present.

The question here is not whether Burke and Macaulay were right or wrong. The point is that history is not merely "past politics," but a force ever living in present political affairs. And the sign of this fusion is that to-day many read Macaulay as a nineteenth-century pamphleteer, and turn elsewhere for historical interpretations ; while many read Burke for his philosophy of history, and go to others for fair judgment on the French Revolution.

These observations furnish an answer to the view that literature somehow loses caste by being propagandist. Much propagandist literature is very bad writing ; but so is much love poetry, and a whole cartload of new novels a week. If a man has something to say—something that has in it greatness of idea or emotion, or of both—and can find expressive language to say it, there are the ingredients of good literature. Whether his purpose be merely to express his idea or his emotion to others, or by so expressing it to persuade or move them to action as well, matters not a pin. A well-written book about a theme worthy of it is none the less good literature for having a pro-

pagandist aim. The cult of " Art for Art's sake " alone is happily dead. Mere chronicle is not history, nor mere factual political writing political literature, any more than *Who's Who* or *Kelly's Directory* is literature. But any kind of writing in which it matters not only what the writer says, but in how good and appropriate English he says it, has in it the potentialities of literature, whatever the aim of the writer may be. This is advisedly a wide definition ; for clarity is among the most certain attributes of all good writing.

II

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

MEN who live in settled societies, under forms of government which few attempt to question in a practical way, need dive back but seldom into the deeper principles of their association. They rest content, for the most part, with debating particular problems, in the light of current expediencies or personal preferences for one solution over another. Or, if they go back to first principles, they incline to do so only academically, putting themselves questions to which they seek theoretical answers with little direct bearing on the practical issues of the day. Theory and practice in politics live then in water-tight compartments ; and no strong conviction that the absolute is incarnate in the current policies of political factions compels them to mingle.

In ages of political unsettlement the case is far other. For then hardly any practical problem can be brought forward without leading to debate upon the ultimate realities. The smallest overt acts then acquire in some sort a universal significance : a man may barely lift his finger without making of it a sign and a symbol of some creed. Every-

thing that he says or does needs high sanction, drawn from abiding and indefeasible laws of God, or Man, or Nature, and gains attributed meanings that refer it to some imputed system or design. In such times all the world's a china shop ; all men are bulls, and all rags are red to all men.

So much is common to epochs of acute political stress and transition. In all, men seek to refer everything to a First Cause. But different epochs tend to seek this cause chiefly in different ways. In some, men's favourite pastime is to re-make God in their own images, seeking divine sanction for their desires by putting their own thoughts into the mouth and mind of deity. In others, historical sanctions are the fashion ; and precedents are sought in a fictitious, and preferably remote, past to justify present aspirations. Or again, if psychology is the vogue, the age makes play with a theory of human nature made up to yield the political conclusions which it desires to draw. Or, if biological speculation prevails, how quickly is society seen as an organism, and reinterpreted in scientific terms to fit men's varying conceptions of current right and justice ! Theology, history, psychology, science—these in all their diverse forms are drawn into the struggle, and become the theoretical stock-in-trade of the controversialist who is determined to view every-day affairs under the aspect of eternity. All things, however small, are referred to some great original ; and all right

action, in whatever matters, is made to appear as the expression of some cogent and immutable law, natural, human, or divine, valid alike for all men and for all times and places.

Of course, no age confines itself to one of these weapons. All ages use all of them, but in widely varying admixtures and degrees. Nor is the distinction between ages of settled conditions and those of political unsettlement by any means absolute. There is *some* speculation about the underlying principles of society at all times, and *some* attempt to relate it to practical affairs. The difference is of more or less ; but it may be of so much more or so much less as to make it far more important than the resemblance.

The age with which this chapter deals was emphatically one in which men went back constantly to first principles, and saw small matters as well as great with the eye of eternity. It was an age of acute political stress and unsettlement, in which practical differences widened until the gulf could be spanned by no compromise save that of exhaustion. Every process of argument, instead of narrowing the points of difference, seemed for the time to increase their number and extent. From arguments men took to arms, still without intermission of the war of words ; and over the clash of swords, the rival proclamations of principle waxed yet louder and more dogmatic. By and by, one party achieved the victory ; and the

Commonwealth arose out of the ashes of the Divine Right of Kings. Yet the Divine Right of the Saints was not for long. οὐδεὶς συνεχῶς ἐνεργεῖ, said Aristotle ; and the saying is true of societies as of men. Enthusiasm flared up, and then flickered and died. The King came back, again to enjoy his own, but in reality to find that " own " changed into a different thing. Before a generation was over, royalty started out again on its travels, to make way this time, not for Saints or Commonwealth, but for moderate toleration, moderate monarchy, and, after a time of transition, the unenthusiastic reasonableness of the Augustan Age. For, by the consent of common speech, the reasonable man is he who refrains from pushing reason to extremes.

It needs no saying that the form into which seventeenth-century England—and Scotland—chose to cast their political speculations was chiefly theological. Even Hobbes, whose mind had definitely an anti-theological bent, was often driven to argue in theological terms. Having based his Leviathan at the outset firmly on a psychological foundation, much to the scandal of many who agreed heartily with his main conclusions, he had none the less to supplement his books on " Man " and " Commonwealth " with a book far longer than either, in which he wrote of a " Christian Commonwealth." And, even so, Hobbes was outlawed by all parties because he established his

principles of commonwealth broadly on a secular and psychological foundation. Ship money, monopolies, the right to enclose, the powers of the Star Chamber, and the like were very real matters at issue between the Stuarts and their Parliaments ; but between *Eikon Basilike* and *Eikonoklastes*, and between the rival armies of Cavalier and Puritan, the battles were fought out mainly in theological terms.

This preoccupation with theological issues has two outstanding results for those who, as historians or students of literature, feed upon the political writings of the seventeenth century in Great Britain. In the first place, it makes much of the argument exceedingly elusive ; for when the antagonists discharge at one another volleys of texts and interpretations of texts, only those who are deeply versed, not merely in the controversies of the time, but in many earlier controversies reaching back into the Middle Ages as well, are able to catch the full associative content of the logomachy, or to award points in the spirit of a contemporary referee. Many a shrewd hit, that turned a text against its previous interpreters, now goes unnoticed ; and many a process of argument, once clear in the light of its associative content, has now become singularly obscure. This makes much of the political speculation of the seventeenth century—most written by the minor combatants, and much even by the major,

such as Milton—definitely hard to read nowadays, when the dissociation of political from theological speculation has, for the main stream of British thought, long become practically complete. Modern political theory mingles itself still with philosophy; and philosophy, even to-day, keeps some points of contact with theology. But between politics and theology there is no longer, for most writers, any direct connection. Even the most devout politician, journeying to the City of God, has to change at Philosophy Junction.

If this preoccupation, not simply with the idea of God, but with the niceties of dogmatic theology, makes much seventeenth-century political speculation remote and hard to grasp, and therefore far from easy to read, there are compensations in the second result that flows from this cause. For undoubtedly concern with the theological aspects of politics was good for the development of English prose style. The texts that the rival combatants flung so dexterously at one another's heads, the phrases and allusions with which they pointed their arguments, the very style which they employed to bludgeon one another, owed a great deal to the Authorised Version. It is true that the Authorised Version can easily be credited even with more influence than it really had ; for it was itself, not the foundation of a new prose style, but only the summing-up and embodiment of a style already well in the making. If there had been no Author-

ised Version, Richard Hooker might well have been regarded as the true father of modern English prose ; for Hooker, writing before the Authorised Version appeared, had many of the qualities that in later authors are commonly attributed to its influence. Doubtless, Hooker's style considerably affected its compilers ; yet it would be fairer to say that in many men at once a new way of writing English prose was born out of a new need. The greatest virtue of this new English is its sonorous appropriateness to the ends it has to serve ; and the greatest virtue of the Authorised Version is that it enshrined this new English as a tradition to which almost every writer for some time after was constrained continually to refer.

The compensation, then, for the excessively theological allusiveness of seventeenth-century political literature is to be found in its admirable stylistic qualities. The standard was, and remained, extraordinarily high ; and in the course of the prolonged disputation a variety of styles, suitable for different purposes and orders of exposition, flowed out of the common tradition. No two writers could well be less alike in stylistic quality than Milton and Bunyan : yet both came out of one and the same tradition. And, while as the century advanced the matters and forms of controversy were gradually changing, and these changes brought with them corresponding varieties in the form and manner of presentation, the new

styles that emerged as politics gradually shook itself free from its theological integument bore everywhere the signs—the never too much to be admired signs—of their long immersion in the waters of religious speculation.

It is true that the greatest English prose stylist of the seventeenth century—Thomas Hobbes—and the most pithy and pointed of his predecessors—Francis Bacon—were the least imbued with the theological spirit. But this does not make against what has been said. The origin of the fine prose-writing of the seventeenth century was not theological ; but its enshrinement in a particular book, and that book the storehouse from which almost all men were compelled constantly to draw citation, illustration, and repartee, ensured the dominance of a prose tradition which could hardly otherwise have become so strongly established. The decay of ordinary standards of prose-writing as the eighteenth century advanced serves to confirm the point. The great writers of the eighteenth century wrote, in their way, as well as the great writers of the seventeenth. But common men and mere scribblers wrote immeasurably and progressively worse.

Nevertheless, most seventeenth-century prose, and political prose in especial, is relatively little read to-day. *Areopagitica* we still study at school ; and *Leviathan* survives as a text-book wherefrom undergraduates are taught, by the method of

contradiction, the philosophical principles of politics now current in the Universities. But who reads *Eikonoklastes* or *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, or Algernon Sidney's *Discourses concerning Government*, or Harrington's *Oceana*, unless he be a specialist student of the seventeenth century or its political ideas? *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as a child's story book, has mercifully become part of our national heritage; but few read *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* or *The Heavenly Footman*. Baxter, too, and Jeremy Taylor, and a host of others, the lovers of literature seem to have resigned almost wholly to the theologians. There is, indeed, just now a vogue for Donne's *Sermons*; but these have been dragged into the fold of literature tied to his poems. The seventeenth-century prose writer with the largest following is still probably Sir Thomas Browne; and he is loved more for his quaintness than for any other quality. Marvell's pamphlets, regarded in his own day as his greatest works, are practically forgotten.

In part, this is no doubt the nemesis that awaits most writing on political subjects. For political writing, as we have seen, is incurably allusive, and most allusive of all when it is at its best. It is woven out of the warp and woof of current happenings, however the weaver may make the pattern of eternity upon his cloth. The eternal principles which the political writer sets out to teach are felt passionately by him just because he

imagines them, not in tranquillity, but in the dust and heat of the daily struggle. By appealing to them he would persuade his fellow men to follow his counsel. His aim is theoretical only because it is practical as well, and because sound theory is regarded as the one sure foundation of profitable conduct. The political theorist who is more than an academician—and it is he who makes the greatest and most resounding contributions to theory—does not want to transcend practical affairs. "If I were prince or legislator," said Rousseau, "I should not waste time in saying what wants doing; I should do it, or hold my peace." It is hard, indeed, to imagine Rousseau either as a legislator, or as holding his peace, whatever his position might have been. But it is not hard to see that the writer, even when he glorifies king or law-giver, glorifies his own mission yet more; for it is his part to prescribe for many kings and legislators the right principles of government.

Thus, while academic treatises are able to remain in the clear, thin air of pure theory, the great originators of political concepts must always come down into the valley, and even into the cave. It is the very practical urgency of current political problems that puts the finest edge upon their thinking—their desire to set things right that lends passion to their work. This passion may be, as in Hobbes, sharp as a sword, to shear a way through received superstitions to a new vision of

the truth ; or, as in Hooker, quiet as it is deep ; or, again, as later in Rousseau, brilliant as a flash of lightning, and no less blinding when it has passed. Whatever its manifestations, passion as well as clarity of vision there must be, if the sight is to penetrate beneath the mere phenomenal surface of events, or to find a synthesis or a statement not merely true, but lending just that illumination to current things that the world requires. No man ever wrote a great book about politics out of the purely theoretical bent of his mind. However it may be in other spheres, in politics διάνοια αὐτὴ οὐδὲν κινεῖ.

Let us begin with Hooker ; for, though he wrote chiefly at the end of the sixteenth century, his book is the best starting-point for a comment on seventeenth-century political literature. Hooker's book on *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is at once the classic defence of the Elizabethan Establishment against Calvinistic dogmatism and almost the starting-point in England of systematic thinking about ultimate political principles. It is, directly, ecclesiastical rather than political : it treats far more at large and more immediately of the Church and of its government than of the State. The political theory which it formulates is no more than incidental to the main purpose, and is neither developed nor made precise. But because for Hooker, as for most of his contemporaries, Church and State are both grounded in certain common

and universal principles, which must be understood if the true character of either is to be made plain, any exposition of that which lies behind the government of the Church must be wide enough to serve as a basis no less for a true philosophy of State. Hooker, therefore, in arguing for the settled constitution of the Elizabethan Church, is impelled at once to state a social philosophy and to insist on the essential unity of the laws which underlie all institutions, both human and divine.

His primary purpose is, indeed, to refute Calvinism, with its fixed insistence on a single form of church government possessing the exclusive sanction of scriptural authority. To the Scriptures, said the English Calvinists, must all things be referred ; and in the Scriptures must be found an infallible guide to forms of organisation as well as to sound doctrine. Against this opinion Hooker protests. Scripture is neither man's sole guide, nor does it prescribe directly all his conduct. Man must use reason as well as authority as his monitor : there is a law of nature which God " from before the beginning hath set for Himself to do all things by " ; and a law " whereby man is in his actions directed to the imitation of God." There are laws of nature and laws of reason ; and out of men's reason spring positive laws, which prescribe this or that course of conduct as means to enable men better to follow the laws of nature. " In laws that which is natural bindeth universally, that

which is positive not so." For positive laws, based on reason, have reference to time and place, and the same positive law is not reasonable under all conditions. Much of natural law, and much of the law of reason, is expressed in the Scriptures ; but what is there written owes its character, not to being so written, but to being part of the law of nature or of reason. It follows that the Scriptures neither answer all questions, nor can be taken as solving all problems with which they deal by a strict and literal application of their sayings. For where they embody accounts of law positive rather than natural, their words cannot be taken as direct precepts without reference to time and place. The forms of Church government are matters of reason, and not of nature ; and no infallible rule for their right ordering can be found in the Scriptures.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the importance of these contentions ; for at the outset of the great controversies of the seventeenth century over politics and religion we find Hooker appealing not only, on the matters most in dispute, from fixed authority to reason, but also, and certainly with no less significance for the future, from a timeless and invariable set of formal precepts to historical sanctions changing with time and place. In this latter aspect, the seventeenth century paid all too little attention to what he urged. The Calvinist would not forsake his quest for a stern and immut-

able law of conduct, embodied in the sacred writings, and providing an infallible answer to every possible question ; and the Royalist used, or misused, history in a very different way when he set out to turn it to the support of the no less universal and infallible invocation of the "Divine Right of Kings." Not for a long time were men to be brought to shake off the opinion that there must be, in both Church and State, some one true way and form of government, valid in all places and upon all occasions as the commandment of some high and inexorable law. In this matter, Hooker reasoned vainly with his contemporaries, and with the generation that followed him. Only much later did this part of his serene and judicious philosophy come into its own.

His appeal from all-embracing authority to reason was of more immediate effect. It counted for much, because, so far from setting reason up against authority, what Hooker attempted was a demarcation of their rightful spheres. He asserted freedom of rational judgment within the supreme precept of the natural law. This appeal to reason was, in his mind, tempered by a strong sense of the force of tradition. The reason acts, not *in vacuo*, but with strong supports to hold it up. Natural law bounds it ; and tradition enables it to grow, not by fits and starts, nor by the unaided motions of single finite minds, but by the slow accretions and modifications of a collective experience. This

sense of the value of tradition is as strong in Hooker as in Burke ; and in Hooker, far more than in Burke, tradition is a living and a growing thing.

With the appeal to reason enters, significantly, the first plain statement in English of the philosophical theory of the Social Contract. It is, moreover, a pregnant view of the Contract that Hooker puts before the world. The pseudo-historical element in it is unimportant : Hooker uses it to explain the rationale rather than the origin of human societies. "Two foundations are there which bear up public societies—the one, a natural inclination, whereby all men desire sociable life and fellowship ; the other, an order expressly or secretly agreed upon, touching the manner of their union in living together." No natural law prescribes the form or precise ordering of political societies. Their existence arises directly from the law of man's nature ; their forms depend on his use of his power to reason. Thus, in Hooker, the substance of society is clearly distinguished from its forms ; and to the latter consent, the product of men's reason and deliberation, is represented as necessary. How much confusion might have been avoided later if subsequent theorists had kept this distinction firmly in mind. The entire force of Hobbes's fundamental argument would have been destroyed by the recognition that, whereas the fact of society depends upon man's nature, its

forms have no such universal and immutable sanction behind them.

Hooker, however, did not develop his idea. He was primarily an ecclesiastical rather than a political writer ; and though, as we have seen, his work went back to the common principles which underlie both political and ecclesiastical organisation, the practical fusion of the two had not yet, in his day, been pushed so far in England—as it had in Geneva —that he was compelled to treat equally of both. He could still leave the practical questions of statecraft, and even the working out of the political aspects of his doctrine beyond a brief statement of essentials, outside the scope of his book. But with Church government he was compelled to deal practically, as a matter already of immediate and vital concern.

Hooker's style is of a piece with his thought—tranquil, careful, and withal pointed and eloquent. Never florid or verbose and totally devoid of rhetorical excesses, it sustains a prolonged weight of argument without ever becoming flat or common. It is Elizabethan rather than of the seventeenth century in its tone and feeling ; and yet it is neither rough, like so much Elizabethan prose, nor over-decorated as if it would apologise for its natural plainness by a plenitude of ornament. As a style fit for controversy and theoretical exposition, it is astonishingly mature and certain of its aim. If Hooker is the father in modern England of systema-

tic political literature written in the vernacular, then English political prose is singularly fortunate in its ancestry.

While Hooker was tolerantly defending the Elizabethan Church Establishment against zealots of more than one kind, another master of English prose was also pleading, but in a very different strain, for an English Church wide enough to include as many as possible of the contending factions. Whereas Hooker wrote of politics because some treatment of the State was essential to his verdict on the true laws of the Church, Bacon's handling of Church affairs was at all points subordinate to his view of the State. The Church was for him essentially a State Church ; and the proper maxims that were to guide conduct of things ecclesiastical were maxims of State. Bacon, in his later writings, has been accused of playing the sycophant to his master, James I ; and beyond doubt the charge is just. But, even if we discount the exaggerated adulation of his direct addresses to the King, the entire bent of his mind was certainly absolutist through and through. Parliaments were, in his view, merely advisory bodies, useful to King and Commonwealth, but with no title to govern. No defined limits could be set to the royal prerogative ; and, if the king governed under the law, he did so by his own will and consent. There is in Bacon no developed theory of politics in any strict sense—for he never finished *The New Atlantis*,

in which he had intended to present his views : he has left us merely certain pithy and practical maxims of statecraft, owing a great deal to Machiavelli, and based for the most part on clearly absolutist assumptions. His defence of absolutism is, moreover, purely nationalist : he will have none of any moral obligation of the sovereign to any law of nature or of nations that might limit his sovereignty. War, he tells us, is good for the Commonwealth, because it exercises the people and develops their qualities of valour ; and no provocation or injustice on the part of another State is necessary in order to furnish a good enough reason for a war. The mere fear that another State may become dangerously powerful is quite enough.

Similarly, when Bacon says that " money is like muck, not good unless it be well spread," his attack on inequality is based purely on considerations of political advantage, and not on any idea of social justice. He is offering to the ruler the advice that he had best not allow any individuals among his subjects to become too powerful, or too rich, or suffer the stirring up of those dangerous discontents among the poor which result from too narrow an appropriation of the social product. What Bacon seeks is the aggrandisement of the national State ; and this is conceived as involved in, and involving, the aggrandisement of its personal ruler.

There is, then, hardly a pin to choose between

Bacon and James I on the question of the absoluteness of the royal authority. But, though they reach the same broad conclusions, their attitudes are in reality quite different. Bacon the courtier may express the fullest agreement with James I's arguments as set forth in *The True Law of Free Monarchies* ; but he is really not at all disposed to found monarchical claims on the quicksands of Divine Right. The bent of his mind is thoroughly secular ; and his case for absolutism is a thoroughly secular case. It is for a ruler who will lead States to greatness, and not for a high priest or vicegerent of God on earth, that he is really contending. If he seems, on occasion, to be affirming the Divine Right of Kings, it is in reality to their secular authority that he does homage.

For the true assertion of the doctrine of Divine Right we must turn to men who wrote far worse, and argued far less powerfully, than Bacon. James I and Sir Robert Filmer, and not Bacon, are the real exponents of that confused and confusing, but for its generation appealing, contention that kings hold their office by divine appointment, and are placed by their more than human tenure above the reach of all human criticism. Whence this fantastic idea came, who shall say ? There is in it, of course, much that is merely transferred from the mediæval claim of the Popes to be the spiritual rulers of Christendom by the direct appointment of God. There is something in it

derived, directly as well as through the Papacy, from the older claims of the Roman Empire. But even out of papal and imperial pretensions combined it is not easy to make a plausible doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. Their descent from Adam hardly gives them a claim to which the entire human race has not an equal right ; and the argument that, since God rules the world, they can be suffered to enjoy kingship only by His will clearly applies with no less force to every *de facto* government—to republics equally with monarchies. The advocates of Divine Right flounder, indeed, hopelessly in their exposition ; and their attempts to find an historical pedigree for their chosen monarchs are no more happy than the rival attempts to base the notion of popular sovereignty on the historical fiction of an original contract.

James I is content, for the most part, merely to assert the overweening claims of kingship, and to postulate for them the sanction of the divine will. It would ill befit the actual holder of the divine power to be nice in substantiating his case. Defenders of Divine Right who lack the advantage of being kings themselves have to descend to arguments of more rational pretension. Thus Filmer, in his *Patriarcha*, which Locke answered, is not merely genealogical. He does not seek merely to prove that Charles I is the legitimate inheritor of Adam's original right, but also to justify, by a parallel line of argument, the claim that

monarchy is the only true and legitimate form of human government. The origin of the State, says Filmer, is patriarchal. It begins in the dominion of a father over the members of his family, and widens with the widening basis of social organisation. The tribe and the nation are but the family writ large, and equally subject, by the divine will, to patriarchal rule.

This second case, for monarchy rather than for any particular monarch, is obviously far stronger than any merely genealogical claim. It is, in point of fact, far more historical than the idea of society as founded in some rational act of contractual assent done in the remote past, and thereafter binding for all time. For the enlarged dominion of the patriarch is at least a real element in the development of many human societies, whereas the infancy of man may be searched in vain for any plausible instances of community originating in any form of rational contract either between ruler and subjects, or between man and man. *Patriarcha* is a silly book ; but the least silly part of it is the resemblance drawn between society and the family.

In proportion, however, as the arguments of Filmer and others for the Divine Right of Kings are strengthened by this historical appeal, they fail to point clearly to the claims of any particular monarch. For the appeal to history is really something quite distinct from the appeal to Divine

Right. It may possibly be held to point to the conclusion that God has so ordered the world as to make monarchical government the only legitimate type ; but it can hardly be used to prefer the claims of one monarch to those of another. It turns, despite those who use it, into a defence of *de facto* monarchies fully as much as the much-abused absolutism of Hobbes turned into a defence of *de facto* governments, however constituted. It is one thing to say that God has clearly laid down the people's need for a Father, and quite another to assert that He has unmistakably indicated who that Father is to be. Filmer and his friends, however, must say both these things, if they are to make their case good.

Feeble as the arguments for the Divine Right of Kings now appear to be, throughout the seventeenth century they remained ceaselessly and actively at war with the notion of popular sovereignty as it appeared in the various forms of the Social Contract theory. Nor is it difficult to see why the former doctrine, unplausible as it now seems, continued to command so wide a measure of support. Apart from a few exceptional thinkers, of whom Hobbes and Bacon are the chief, the seventeenth century was steeped in the idea that the world was divinely governed, and that all the laws of its working were essentially laws of God. Whatever men willed, they attributed to the will of God ; and it seemed to them axiomatic that

clear knowledge of God's will involved certain guidance for the right governance of all the affairs of life. Hooker might argue that it was no part of God's will to lay down precise forms and methods for the government of all human societies, and that these were matters for men's rational will, acting only under the general guidance of the natural and divine law. The mass of men would assent to no such distinction. Whether they professed to find their sole authority in the Scriptures, or to derive their conclusions from the direct interpretation of the natural law, they were sure that all questions admitted of only one answer that could possibly be pleasing to God Almighty.

If, then, they were monarchists, they had to show that monarchy was God's law ; and, if they were fain to serve a particular king, they felt it incumbent on them to demonstrate that he was in very truth the Lord's Anointed. Or, if there were men who set out to resist the exclusive claims of the royal power, in the name either of interest or of conscience, they could not stop short of proving that God had willed a law higher than the law of kings, or that He had ordained some terrestrial authority to be greater than the authority of kings. Thus Filmer stood out for Divine Right ; and thus Milton argued that the whole tenure of kings and magistrates was merely derivative and depended by the divine will upon their appointment and maintenance by those over whom they were

to rule. The struggle was not between divine right and human right, but between the divine right of kings and the no less divine right of men and citizens. Men might challenge the rule of kings or peoples ; the last thing in their minds was to challenge the rule of God.

This largely accounts for the high place which the idea of law held in the political theories of the seventeenth century. The rule of kings would be mere tyranny, and that of peoples mere caprice of the crowd, if they were divorced from the idea of law. Law positive was no doubt a product of established society ; but law natural, which was generally assumed to be at least a partial expression of law divine, necessarily preceded it. Hooker's account of the true character of society is embedded in his exegesis of the various types of law, and their force and authority for mankind. God himself acts, if not under law, at any rate in accordance with the law of His being. God's vicegerent, the king, is equally bound to act in accordance with natural law, though, since he can have no human superior, he is the sole interpreter of what the law prescribes. In the opposite camp, the sovereign people is no less subject to the same law : no one has more contempt for the sovereignty of the sinful multitude that accepts not the dictates of law natural and divine than such staunch upholders of the doctrine of popular sovereignty as Milton or Algernon Sidney. Indeed,

they go much further in this direction than the advocates of Divine Right. The Royalists are disposed to argue that a bad king comes as a chastisement from God, and must therefore be endured with patient submission. But the Puritans are more than half inclined to narrow the rights of man into the rights of good men—that is, of men who live in accordance with the law of God—and to deny to all others any share in sovereignty. That way lies the rule of the "Saints"—the natural dominance of the few righteous over the many who are ungodly. The case for popular sovereignty must not be confused, in its seventeenth-century applications, with the modern case for democracy. Lilburne and Winstanley may have been democrats: Cromwell and Milton most assuredly were not. The debates of Cromwell's army leaders, so faithfully and vividly recorded in the *Clarke Papers*, are ample evidence that an adherent of the idea of government as founded upon a popular contract need not be a democrat as well.

The idea of a code of law underlying all government limited in effect the claims of both the rival factions. The king might have no human superior, and no subject might have the right to resist his will; but the monarch was bound by natural law to act for the welfare of his subjects. There might, on the other hand, be no legitimate basis for government save the consent and contract of

the governed ; but both the contract and its form might be dictated by laws of nature and reason which were the direct commands of God. This idea of law is none the less important for being extremely ambiguous and confusing. The seventeenth century seldom distinguished clearly between a law which describes what does happen and a law which prescribes what ought to happen. The law of nature appears as a medley of inductive laws of matter and deductive laws of mind—of physical description and of moral precept. What must be and what ought to be are constantly getting confused. But this does not alter the fact that law of some sort is thought of as underlying all institutions, and as prior to the entire relationship of man with man.

It was Hobbes's opposition to this attitude that made him appear to most of his contemporaries so fundamentally immoral. For the essence of Hobbism is the assertion that justice and injustice are purely matters of convention, and dependent on the existence of the social bond. Until there is an organised society among men, there is, according to Hobbes, no law : right and wrong are what society makes them, and the natural law, as a moral law, has no existence at all. This absence of a moral law from the world, apart from the positive laws of human societies, seemed, to Hobbes's contemporaries, equivalent to a denial of God's existence ; for how could there be a God from

whom did not emanate directly a law for the guidance of men's lives? When Hobbes identified the "state of nature" with the "state of war," and painted his unforgettable picture of the condition of man's life in the state of nature as "poor, nasty, solitary, brutish, and short," he outraged the consciences of Royalists and Puritans alike.

As a stylist, Hobbes is by far the greatest political prose-writer of the seventeenth century. He has all Bacon's terseness, with far more sustained power; all Milton's eloquence, without his defacing proneness to merely rhetorical exercises; all Locke's lucidity, with a far greater and more diversified command of both phrase and constructive force. His style is half his argument; and it is admirably appropriate to what he sets out to say. It shows the iconoclastic quality of his thought: it strikes hard and it strikes home.

And how great an iconoclast Hobbes was! A far greater iconoclast than Milton, who shattered only the already fallen fragments of that poor *Eikon Basilike* of Dr. Gauden, or of Charles I. A far greater than Sidney or Harrington, though they delved far deeper than Milton into the underlying realities of politics. For Hobbes broke the idol of God Himself, by thrusting God clean out of the constructive part of his political speculations.

Commentators upon Hobbes have almost invariably stressed above all else the dependence of his thought on the conditions of his time. He

saw, they have said, in his own day the indispensable necessity of order and strong government ; and in the system which he made he subordinated all else to the attainment of these ends. This is true enough ; and doubtless Hobbes framed his theoretical conclusions very much by the light of contemporary affairs. But his method is far more significant than his conclusions. It was clever to take the Social Contract theory, to wrest it from the hands of the opponents of absolutism, and to make of it absolutism's supreme defence. But for this cleverness Hobbes paid in his own day the penalty of an almost entire lack of influence. His argument was no more than clever : hard enough to answer, it carried no conviction. The complete surrender of all rights by the subject, which Hobbes postulated as the chief condition of the original contract, persuaded none of his opponents ; and it was unacceptable to those who agreed with his conclusions precisely because it implied an original sovereignty of the people. It is often tempting, but it seldom pays, to accept the postulates of the opposition, and then to erect upon them a totally different set of conclusions. Marx was clever, just as Hobbes was clever, when he accepted the Ricardian theory of value, and sought to build up Socialism on a Ricardian basis. But, in doing so, he only set generations of his followers to wander in a wilderness of economic error. The Royalists of the seventeenth century

were of stronger stuff. They refused to be led up the garden path. They sternly repudiated Hobbism, even when it appeared to lead directly to the practical conclusions which they desired. And yet this was not because they saw further or more clearly, but, for the most part, because they insisted on conducting the argument in theological terms.

The notion of the "social contract," upon which Hobbes based his contentions, is of course far older than the seventeenth century. We have seen it in Hooker, and Hooker inherited it from the Middle Ages. It was fully developed in Bodin, and passed into the modern European tradition by way of Grotius. Indeed, in some form it was almost bound to develop as soon as men set to work to think about the basis of political association. Theologians have always been ready to produce texts from Scripture in its support ; and it appears in Greek and Roman, as well as in Hebrew, political speculation. But in the politico-religious controversies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it assumed a quite special place, and was used by almost every writer of note, except those who were prepared to base their arguments purely on the assumption of the Divine Right of Kings.

At bottom, all writers who upheld the idea of contract were seeking for social institutions a basis in consent. To Hobbes, no less than to Milton or Locke, some sort of consent on the part of the

governed seemed to be the necessary condition of political association. The representation of this consent as manifested in a particular act done at some remote time in the infancy of humanity was really not essential to the doctrine, though it lent for the time powerful support to certain of its applications. Men gave historical form to the doctrine mainly because that was, in the absence of real knowledge about the remoter part, the easiest way of presenting a case based really rather on logical than on temporal priority. The contract must be logically prior to the existence of organised societies : it was natural to picture it as also prior in time. But what was really being sought was a firm foundation for the solid fact of political obligation.

The Social Contract theory appears in two main forms. Some writers, like Algernon Sidney, think of it as a contract between rulers and ruled, between the people and the government, while others, like Hobbes, present it as a contract among the people themselves, out of which government emerges, but to which no ruler or governor, as such, can be a party. In the first form, which is also by far the older and, on the face of the matter, the more plausible, the theory involves a contract between ruler and ruled, under which the former agrees to govern according to certain principles, or within certain defined limits. Even if the people gives up to the King, or to the rulers, power unlimited

in its scope, still this power is, under the contract, to be exerted only in accordance with the dictates of natural law. A king who governs against the law of God or nature forfeits, on this showing, his authority ; and his people regains its freedom if he breaks this implied term of the contract. Such a theory can be used to justify absolute monarchy, but not its abuse. It implies the right of revolution against an unjust ruler.

More commonly, however, this form of the Social Contract theory also implies some limitation of the scope of sovereignty. The ruler need not be given absolute power, even within the bounds of the laws of God and nature. His authority may be regarded as limited in any way, and to any extent, in accordance with the assumed terms of the original contract. The idea of sovereignty as shared between Crown and Parliament, each having its prescribed rights and sphere of action, is prominent in seventeenth-century thought. And, as the terms of the contract have to be imagined, and cannot be deciphered in any actual instrument of government, the theory leaves each writer free to make the terms of the original contract in accordance with his own ideas of political right and expediency. For the most part, naturally enough, the Social Contract in this form is used as a weapon of defence against arbitrary government. Kings are accused by restive subjects of violating the contract just as, earlier, they had been accused of

withholding the customs which prevailed in England *tempore Regis Edwardi*. Both arguments were historical in form ; but both were really arguments from fact to justice. Men had been fond of imagining that whatever customs they wanted to establish or uphold had prevailed in the days of good King Edward the Confessor. In the seventeenth century they preferred to find a sanction for what they wanted by inventing an original and prehistoric contract to fit their needs.

In popular thought, this notion of contract held its own, as was seen when the Revolution Parliament took James II to task for a breach of the original contract. But in political literature the other conception, of the Social Contract as an agreement among men to set up some form of government, gradually ousted the other view. On this showing, the people themselves came together, and bound themselves, as the Pilgrim Fathers actually did before they set sail in the *Mayflower*, to form a State. The contract was one of mutual defence and association, made among equals who agreed to surrender their original powers into the hands of some "determinate human superior." The people themselves, it was urged, could not govern the State, though they might sanction it and call it into being. There could be no State until they had agreed, not merely to form one, but also to place it under some definite rule. The Social Contract was, in this view, a contract among

equals to establish a government ; and the government so set up derived all its rights from those surrendered by the citizens who called it into being.

The theory, in this form also, appears mainly as a defence of the people against the overweening claims of their rulers. It makes the authority of the rulers, however absolute it may be, purely derivative, and dependent absolutely on the actual or implied consent of the governed. It is the easiest justification of revolution ; for, on the face of the matter, the people has a right to revoke the authority which it had the power originally to grant. It is this form of the Social Contract theory that Hobbes adopts, only to turn it powerfully against its chief upholders. For, in Hobbes's view, the contract has been made once and for all at the origin of any new political society, and the descendants of those who made it have no claim to annul or modify its provisions. Each man binds his posterity for evermore ; and there is no limit to the obligation which he incurs on their behalf. For Hobbes both argues that sovereignty, as it is established by the Social Contract, is of its essence unlimited and indivisible, and also, by denying any idea of right and wrong as antecedent to society, emancipates his ruler even from obedience to any law of nature or reason. The ruler may govern as badly as he pleases : this will not in any way affect his sovereign authority, as long as he is able

to maintain himself as *de facto* sovereign. Only if he attacks certain final and inalienable rights of the citizen—of which self-preservation is the most important—has the subject any right of resistance to the power that rules over him. These exceptions, indeed, Hobbes does admit, drawing them directly from certain fundamental postulates about human nature. Man, by his very nature, wills his own preservation ; and it is in order to make this more secure that he consents to enter into society at all. He cannot, then, alienate this fundamental right—this law of his being. Whatever positive law may prescribe—and there is no limit to its scope—it cannot remove any man's right of resistance if his own life is threatened.

Hobbes has often been accused of illogicality in admitting this right, while he affirms in the same breath that the power of the sovereign is absolute and unlimited in its very nature. But he is really consistent on this point ; for he denies, not the sovereign's right, but only the subject's duty of submission. Where he is illogical is in denying all right of resistance save on his fundamental reserved points, and, above all, in postulating that any beings as utterly unsocial as his " natural " man could ever form any sort of stable society. Hobbes's state of nature is an unreal abstraction, not merely unhistorical but positively unthinkable. And, once this is admitted, the entire edifice which Hobbes reared upon his suppositions concerning

the State of nature falls to the ground. Yet this "natural man" of the seventeenth century was not without posterity. He was reincarnated, and put to different uses, in the "economic man" of the nineteenth-century economists.

Hobbes was too clever by half. His theory was an *ad hoc* creation, designed to justify a particular attitude to a vital contemporary problem. He set out to turn the weapons of the enemies of absolutism upon their makers. He brought to the task a splendid eloquence and a ruthless logical power which have ensured his immortality despite the general repudiation of his doctrines. But he could only turn the arguments of his opponents into a case for absolutism by proceeding upon radically false premises about human nature. And, even so, he could adduce no plausible reason for his view that the original contract, once made, binds for ever the posterity of those who made it. His case for holding this was really a pure case of expediency. He believed the securing of unquestioned order to be so much more important than anything else that he insisted above all on a settled duty of man to obey. But the plausibility of this view vanishes with the passing of the age of revolutions. Societies which feel themselves reasonably secure against revolution may continue to value order; but they will value other things besides. They will not rest content with a social theory that puts order first, and everything else nowhere.

Nor did even Hobbism succeed in satisfying thoroughly the claims of order. For the sole case for Hobbes's sovereign is that he does keep order. Apart from this, he has no claim—moral or natural—to allegiance ; and, if he fails in this, his sovereignty evaporates instantly. Leviathan is only a *de facto* ruler : he has no moral or divine right. If a rebel slays him, and climbs into the seat of authority, the new ruler's right is as good as his predecessor's. But in times of revolution the trouble usually is to discover where *de facto* sovereignty does actually lie. Hobbes went into exile with Charles, and then made his peace with Cromwell, and then again with a new Charles. At what precise moment did each of these become sovereign ? What guidance could Hobbes have given to a man who, at the critical point in the struggle between King and Commonwealth, was trying to make up his mind on which side his rightful allegiance lay ? No wonder both parties looked askance at the philosopher of Malmesbury. No wonder his contemporaries, with one voice, repudiated all connection with him and his opinions.

For the defenders of the contract theory, as a bulwark against absolutist claims, Hobbes performed, despite himself, an extraordinarily useful service. His twisting of the theory served to show that no event, real or imagined, that had happened in the distant past could possibly be the basis of the life of society in the present. Men might

return thereafter to arguing in terms of a Social Contract ; but the emphasis passed definitely from historical to contemporary significance. Consent, men realised, if it was to mean anything at all, must be present and continuous consent. If society was to rest upon the will of its members, this will must be active in the present, and not merely have been expressed at some time in the past. The advocates of the view that all the powers of kings and magistrates were purely derivative had, indeed, usually taken up this attitude. The ruler must not merely have received his appointment from the people : he could retain it only by their consent, expressed or implied. But the reaction against Hobbes caused this point to be much more clearly emphasised. Locke summed up both the theoretical and the practical conclusions of a century of argument and civil strife when he based the existence of society, not upon an historical contract, but upon a contractual consent which, however it originated, was re-affirmed every day that society continued in being. Locke was the philosopher of the revolutionary settlement of 1688. With him we pass into a new world—and a new chapter.

III

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

JOHN LOCKE was not a great writer. The unsettlements of the Elizabethan Age produced Hooker ; the struggle of Cavalier and Roundhead Hobbes, Milton, and Marvell, and a host of minor writers of good and forcible English. The Revolution settlement, in the realm of political philosophy, produced only Locke. The age-long struggle, while its issue remained uncertain, was creative : out of it came passionate flow of language and argument, high satire and eloquent invective, a high standard of thought and expression in verse and prose alike. The settlement, when it came at last, roused only a masterpiece of plain commonsense, written in clear, expressive prose with highly competent workmanship, but without any high quality of artistic greatness. Hooker and Hobbes, as well as Milton and Marvell, were literary artists of the first order. Locke was, in the field of literature, only a competent craftsman.

Locke stands, however, at an extraordinarily interesting turning-point in the development of English prose style. Till almost the end of the seventeenth century literary prose preserves a

certain decorative quality akin to that of poetry. It lays, moreover, great stress on sound—not only in the hands of a rhetorical writer like Milton, but also in those of Hobbes or Bacon or Henry More. Its aim is not merely that of saying what it has to say in the most suitable words that can be found—or of appearing to do only this—but of saying it with an unconcealed quality of artistic appeal. I do not mean that it is full of purple patches—few writers have less of them than Hooker—but that it sets out to bind throughout a spell of sound as well as of sense. And, because to do this is of the tradition, and involves no unnatural or exceptional straining after effect, the English prose-writers of the seventeenth century are able to do it without arousing the antagonism which artificial writers of decorated prose—Pater, for example—almost inevitably arouse.

It has been suggested in the previous chapter that the theological preoccupations of the seventeenth century and the influence of the Prayer Book and the Authorised Version have more than a little to do with this quality in the prose-writers of the time. Locke's prose, even when he is quoting Scripture and dealing with theological issues, as he often does, is plainly in process of secularisation. The change is not complete : Locke is, in both thought and style, a seventeenth- and not an eighteenth-century writer. But it is well advanced. In his style as well as in his thought, Locke as an

author plainly foreshadows the transition to the modern world.

Two factors contributed more than any others to this subtle change in the quality of English writing—the development of the scientific attitude and the growth of toleration. The exact scientist, in whatever field, must above all else insist on using words in clear, definite and unchanging senses. He has to beware of the associative content of the common words which he is compelled often, and above all in the social and human sciences, to employ ; for the rich connotation of words serves to hamper him in giving them a plain and unmistakable denotation. The seventeenth century owed much of the richness of its style to its free play with the associative content of the words it used : the thinness of Locke's style is partly due to his determination to be precise, and to have words mean what he wants them to mean, and not what they suggest to his hearers. In other words, Locke is utterly unrhetorical ; and all rhetoric is largely an appeal to association. Locke prefers the " penny plain " to the " twopence coloured."

There had been, of course, foreshadowings of this new style earlier in the seventeenth century. It seems as if no Elizabethan, except Bacon, was capable of writing plain, uncoloured prose even if he tried. But Hobbes, in some of his minor writings, comes near to it. And, as the century advances, the transition can be plainly marked.

The contrast between Ralph Robinson's and Bishop Burnet's English versions of More's *Utopia* excellently marks the change, though Burnet himself is a writer essentially of the age of Clarendon rather than that of Swift.

The scientific spirit, we have seen, was one factor in the change ; and it has been suggested that the growth of toleration was another. This, however, is perhaps to mistake the symptom for the cause. For toleration itself grew not so much because men worked out a theory of toleration, and then set out to apply it, as because they found themselves compelled to be more tolerant in practice, and then sought a theory to justify their tolerance. The growth of toleration proceeded, in fact, from exhaustion rather than from conviction. After the Restoration the " Saints," who could never have stomached toleration if they had been victorious, were defeated, but by no means crushed out of existence. The Royalists were back in authority, but only by consent of those who, no Royalists themselves in the strict sense, could not endure the absolute rule of the " Saints." Limited monarchy was the only solution ; and the same compulsion as limited the powers of the monarch set limits to most things besides. Both extremes had failed : it was necessary to try a middle course. The " Character of a Trimmer " admirably fitted the times.

For a while, naturally, these conditions of the

Restoration were not clearly seen, save by a very few. Tory pamphleteers such as L'Estrange let fly at their adversaries on the assumption that the restored monarchy was the self-same monarchy for which the Cavaliers had fought. Samuel Butler, in *Hudibras*, castigated Puritan enthusiasm without realising that the moral of his strictures could be applied in truth equally against the "high-flyers" of his own side. Dryden, in *Absalom and Achitophel* and other satires, recanted his praise of Cromwell in unmeasured denunciations of Shaftesbury and the Whigs. But in reality the restored Stuarts held the throne only on the implied condition of strictly moderate behaviour. Though it was a Papist King whom the Parliament sent again on his travels in 1688, even a Protestant King would have fared no better had he not observed, in the last resort, the condition that he must govern in accordance with the views of a sufficient proportion of his influential subjects. And as, in most matters save the sacredness of property and the rights of the squirearchy, these influential subjects differed widely in opinion, to govern in accordance with their views meant in practice to govern with a large measure of toleration—large, that is, according to contemporary standards.

Now, toleration, in any form, implies a certain coolness of judgment. And this coolness reacts strongly upon the methods of expression. The writers of political prose after 1688 want, for the

most part, to be or at least to appear cool and detached, and to dissociate themselves from all impolite excesses of enthusiasm. They aim at polish, rather than at power. The seventeenth-century writers had entered the field with the manners of the camp : they had written with a pen that was also a sword. Their successors cultivated the manners of the court or the coffee-house : they desired above all to excel in letters that should be polite. Their *litterae* were, in a word, *humaniores* ; and to what an extent does the phrase smell of the times !

Locke, I have said, is a writer of the transition. He has discarded the passions of his predecessors ; but he has not yet found the polish of the new era. He writes competently, and with real skill, seventeenth-century prose from which the soul has departed with the change of spiritual content. He says what he has to say well and clearly ; but because the traditional style which he inherits and modifies is at war with the spirit that underlies his writing, his work is devoid of true literary art. It is Halifax, rather than Locke, who, thoroughly imbued with the new spirit, finds a way of writing that suits exactly his mood, and points the way towards the perfecting of the new prose styles by Steele and Addison and, above all, by Jonathan Swift.

That Locke should have written so tolerantly of toleration marks the change of attitude. For

Locke was almost the first writer of the seventeenth century who wrote as if he thought that he might possibly be wrong. Hooker's message had been, not so much that error should be tolerated as that men should recognise that truth had many forms. Locke, on the other hand, set out to plead—within limits, it is true—for the tolerance of actual errors, and not merely for an absence of fanaticism in the interpretation of truth. He would not tolerate atheists—for he believed them incapable of moral standards—or Catholics—for he thought them excluded by their own intolerance. But these were special exceptions ; and, broadly speaking, his case was for a general tolerance based on a real belief in the fallibility of human interpretation. Such tolerance of religious difference can, when matters religious and secular are sharply divided, be combined with the most fanatical intolerance in non-theological matters. But in Locke the bounds of theology and philosophy have not been clearly marked off. His tolerance is accordingly general, and subject only to particular and specified exceptions.

Toleration, however, is half-brother to unbelief ; and Locke's tolerant affirmation of the true basis of society is the prelude to a loss of interest in the ultimate principles of social obligation. Though Jacobitism long survived as a menace to the new constitution of England, the Revolution of 1688 had really settled the form of the commonwealth.

Even if a Charles or a James had returned to enjoy his own again, he would have found that "own" changed out of all recognition, and could have held his throne only on the new conditions. The return of the Stuarts in the eighteenth century would have been little more than a palace revolution. Not only Protestantism, but also Parliamentarism, was too deeply rooted to be dragged up by a mere change of dynasty.

Even, then, if the dynasty was not settled after 1688, the forms of government were settled enough for men to lose interest in them. The emphasis shifts, accordingly, for the time from political philosophy to political pamphleteering. The new wars of words concern, not the ultimate principles of political obligation, but this or that particular point of political policy. There are exceptions, no doubt. Bolingbroke sketches the character and the authority of a "Patriot King"; and Tory "High Flyers" like Sacheverell keep up a rain of impracticable rhetoric. But for practical purposes the main issue is settled; and, when a thing is settled for practical purposes, it is usually settled for theoretical purposes as well.

The development of the political pamphlet during the hundred years that followed the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 makes a highly interesting study. It is, for one thing, inseparably connected with the growth of journalism; and much of the best pamphleteering is actually on the

margin of periodical writing. Daniel Defoe was both among the best and most indefatigable of political pamphleteers, and, more than any other man, the effective founder of English critical journalism in the strict sense. And, again, the pamphlets of the century mirror, with singular accuracy, both the changing popular passions and interests of an eventful era, and the points of contact between the immediate controversies with which they chiefly deal and the more abiding problem of the philosophy of society.

I am far from suggesting that there were no pamphlets before 1688. There were—floods of them, and in most a subordinate flood of Scriptural quotation. Milton's chief political writings were pamphlets ; Marvell was a noted pamphleteer. Saxby's famous *Killing No Murder* foreshadowed Defoe without the irony. Puritanism, especially, spawned pamphlets with an astonishing fertility. And Cavalier Churchmen, in defence of the Divine Right of Kings, were not far behind. But, apart from the work of a few giants, the pamphlet-writing of the Civil War period is not strong in literary quality ; and even the giants of those days, despite Milton's *Areopagitica*, were rarely at their best as pamphleteers. It is the eighteenth century, with Defoe as its John the Baptist, that brings the political pamphlet to its highest point of efficiency as both literature and polemic.

After the Restoration satire, with verse as its

chosen medium, first gets in its blow. Between Dryden's sharp thrusts of the rapier and the hard knocks of Butler's undiscriminating bludgeon there is a world of difference ; and yet both are essentially satirists of the Restoration. *Hudibras*, however, is the trampling of the victors upon the prostrate bodies of the enemy. It celebrates, scurrilously, the King's return and the defeat of the " Saints." Its virtue is in a crude energy, more than a little vulgar and, in bulk, exceedingly tiresome. I doubt if many, nowadays, are at the pains of reading it through. Yet there are phrases in it that everyone remembers—though perhaps it is significant that most of them come right at the beginning of the book.

> " Settle controversy by
> Infallible artillery ;
> And prove their doctrines orthodox
> By apostolic blows and knocks,"

and the no less famous

> " Pulpit, drum ecclesiastic,
> Was beat with fist instead of a stick,"

both occur in the opening pages.

There is no subtlety in Butler's verse, and none in his satire. It is all horse-play—vigorous and admirably quick in the movement of its rough lines. But it lacks the body for so long a work—

no one wants the clown to be on the stage the whole evening.

Dryden is, of course, immeasurably superior to Butler as a literary craftsman. Purely as a technician, he is among the most accomplished of English poets. In the craft of political satire, *Absalom and Achitophel* has never been excelled. Not merely are the oft-quoted characters of Shaftesbury and Buckingham pieces of craftsmanship in which not a word could be bettered—perfect models of both polish and strength—the passages that no one quotes are such as might well be quoted for models of excellence if these others did not exist. The entire original *First Part* of the poem, as a sustained effort, is astonishing in the brightness of its technical skill. It is as finished as Pope—which Dryden commonly was not—with far more than Pope's vigour and command of sound as well as phrase. For Dryden is still near enough to the Elizabethans to write his verses with that quality of music which the eighteenth century, with all its point and refinement of phrase, somehow utterly lost, at any rate in its handling of blank verse and the heroic couplet. All Pope's lines are written to be read in a book : Dryden's sound as if they were above all meant to be heard.

And yet, when all credit has been done to Dryden as craftsman, something remains unsaid. It is not only because one is aware, in the back of one's mind, of the *Horatian Ode* on Cromwell's death

that the satire does not ring quite true. The writer of *Hudibras* had a real, simple, lusty hatred of Puritans. One is quite sure that Dryden did not take his own partisanship quite seriously, and that he would, if things political had gone differently, been almost as happy writing on the opposite side. This cannot detract from the quality of his craftsmanship : it may impair his status as a writer. Dryden lacks sincerity of thought. He was, as his portraits of persons show, an exceedingly acute observer of other men. But there is in all his work not even the glimmer of a great idea or a great emotion. He failed as a lyrist, partly, at least, for want of emotion. Did he not fall short a little in satire, despite his transcendent craftsmanship, for lack of an idea ?

Political satire in verse blossoms in the Restoration era, and then dies. There is, in the eighteenth century, almost none of it that counts. Mandeville ranks too low as a writer ; Defoe's verses rise above mediocrity only in the *True-born Englishman* and the *Hymn to the Pillory* (for *Jure Divino* is abominably dull) ; and Swift, who wrote, when he liked, really good, quickly-moving, light verse—on the *Death of the Dean*, for example—preferred prose as the medium of his important political writing. Pope's *Essay on Man* touches politics, it is true ; but it is tract and not satire, and its political commonplaces are only rescued from mediocrity by the extraordinary skill of the phrasing.

> " For forms of government let fools contest :
> Whate'er is best administered is best,"

proclaims not only a contemporary point of view which sharply marks the change from the previous era, but also the author's contempt for the originality of idea which he did not possess. The age of Pope was not interested in the underlying principles of political association ; but it was keenly interested in the current interplay of political affairs.

The political pamphlet, written in prose, and, unless its literary merits save it from oblivion, of purely ephemeral or at most of purely historical interest, is the typical form of political literature in the age that follows the Revolution of 1688. The pamphlet of this type is intended definitely as a contribution to current politics : its aim is to influence opinion on some immediate political issue. It is, therefore, as we have seen, closely akin to journalism : it performs, indeed, a function which in the modern world has been usurped by the newspaper and the review. Even in the days of Defoe and Swift it is already beginning to a considerable extent to shape itself into the pattern of a journal ; for the typical political journal of the days of Defoe and Swift is practically a periodical pamphlet.

It is easy to see that the pamphlet, both occasional and periodical, was exceedingly well adapted to the conditions of the time. The " public " which the political writers of those days set out to in-

fluence was small and well-defined. Swift on one side and Steele and Addison on the other addressed themselves mainly to the public of the coffee-houses—the immediate political *entourage* of Court, Parliament and Society. That extraordinary man, Defoe, cast his net far more widely, writing with the opinion of the developing middle classes always in mind. Defoe, indeed, was the first writer who set out deliberately to write for the solid *bourgeois* public on political matters ; and it is this difference of aim that marks him out above all others as the principal founder of modern journalism. For the methods of approach that are suited to the needs of a small public of critical and argumentative gentlemen, accustomed to meet in Parliament, coffee-house and club, with plenty of leisure to talk things over, and a keen and cultivated appreciation of a shrewd intellectual thrust or a party score, are quite unsuited to the purpose of influencing the wider body of middle-class opinion. Swift aims at being clever, knowing well that his public will appreciate cleverness : Defoe has rather to conceal his cleverness, and to appear in the guise of the plain, blunt man who has no use for subtleties, but is to be valued for his possession of a fund of sound commonsense. Swift belongs to the intelligentsia ; but Defoe's spiritual home is in or near Fleet Street.

This difference, as well as party rancour, helps to account for the scorn with which Defoe's political

writing was regarded by his leading contemporaries in the art of political letters. He seemed to them vulgar in himself, and desirous of appealing to vulgar people. It could not be denied that he got in a nasty knock at times ; but the polite opinion was that he achieved this only by hitting below the belt. The antagonist whom he disarmed was indignant, rather than humiliated, to find his rapier knocked out of his hand by a common cudgel. Such pamphleteering footpads ought to be kept in their place—and their place was not the art of polite letters.

This word "polite" must not, however, be misunderstood. Swift was a master of "polite letters" ; but as a controversialist he was often anything but polite, in the modern sense of the word. Gentlemen in all ages suppose themselves licensed to be ruder than other people ; for they can practise rudeness according to a polite convention which belongs to them alone. Defoe, though he loved to dress in fine clothes, was, to their minds, no gentleman. Every line that he wrote foreshadowed, in its manner even more than its matter, the advancing claims of the vulgar middle classes. And the Augustan Age, with all its insolent appearance of secure political establishment, was acutely afraid of the social pretensions of the classes below it. It knew that, in the changed dispensation of England, the trading and commercial classes had to count ; and it did not want them to count. It

was even as fond as a modern suburban tea-party of discussing the terrible and ever-increasing audacity of servants, and of the lower orders in general.

Defoe was, for what he set out to do, wonderfully well equipped. He gave himself no time to polish, pouring out books and pamphlets in an endless stream that no great writer, save Cobbett, has ever equalled in volume. He had the knack of sitting down at any moment, when he wanted to further a cause or turn a penny, and writing straight out exactly what he wanted to say. He had no need to polish : nay, more, even a suggestion of polish would have destroyed the effect. He could write fiction with an air of truth that is even now hard to penetrate, and nonsense with an air of conviction that was apt to deceive his contemporaries, just because what he wrote seemed to come so plain and natural. Defoe did not invent plain prose ; for that has existed ever since plain men learned to write at all ; but he did, I think, invent its conscious literary use. He was the first literary artist to make a virtue of his lack of art.

Thus, whether Defoe was writing a popularisation of Locke, or a " spoof " biography of some famous criminal or soldier, or a purely occasional pamphlet on some matter of current controversy, his aim was always to appear in the guise, not of a literary artist using the magical power of his art for the persuasion of a critical and cultured audience, but of a practical

man who had taken up the pen for the occasion only because he had something special or extraordinary that he could not help saying to the world. Locke's *Treatises* were really pamphlets on current politics cast into the universal form of philosophy. Defoe, in his popular Whig tracts, particularised them, dotting all the "i's" and crossing all the "t's" which Locke had left carefully undotted and uncrossed. In dealing with the other side, he followed a different method. Most arguments can be made to look absurd if they are pushed too far. In *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* Defoe made the Tory "High-flyers" look ridiculous by pushing their case against the toleration of dissent to the logical conclusion that all recusant Dissenters ought to be simply exterminated—and achieved the triumph of being taken seriously by the extremists whose attitude he had set out to parody. And all this powerful writing owed much of its effect to the apparent absence of any seeking after literary effect. It seemed a plain man speaking straight from the heart. But, in truth, few men's hearts were ever less plain than Defoe's.

This stark plainness of style has another consequence. No one will ever be able to say with certainty what Defoe did write, and what he did not. His political writing was mostly anonymous; and almost every political pamphlet that appeared in his day, be it only written well and in a plain style, has been attributed to him by one authority

or another. Perhaps there are connoisseurs of wine who can say with certainty from what vineyard and in what year almost any wine set before them came. But this is because the aim of the wine-producer is to bring out the bouquet of his wine. Defoe wanted to hide his bouquet ; and he hid it so well that, in many cases, no literary style-taster can possibly be sure what is his.

I account Defoe one of the greatest of English political writers. But this is not on the score of any great original contribution which he has made to the art of political thought. He counts above all for two things—in literature as the first master of a forthright and dramatic plainness of style, and in politics as the first man who set out to reinterpret political ideas in terms of the minds, as well as the problems, of the ordinary trading middle-class public. Neither of these was a small thing ; and out of their marriage was born, for good or ill, the art of popular journalism.

Swift contrasts sharply with Defoe ; and Swift is, I think, the greatest of all the political pamphleteers. Swift's style and manner are literary in their essence. Not that he writes, ever, an adorned or pretentious style. Far from it. His sentences flow easily, and with a much greater simplicity than Defoe's. There is never a redundant word, never a purple passage, never a strained or rhetorical allusion. But this is Swift's art. Defoe flings words about, as plain men do,

and often leaves a sentence shapeless or a sequence of argument unevenly developed. With Swift every word, every sentence, and every argument is in place. All redundancies have been removed, all surface imperfections refined away. The contours are so perfect that even the slightest touch of ornamentation would spoil them. The plain man, as well as the talented amateur of the coffee-house, can read them ; but only the amateur can get their full value. Their first appeal is above all to a cultured public, and to the trained literary sense.

The Conduct of the Allies and *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* are about equally famous. So are *Gulliver's Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe*. In both cases how pointed is the contrast, and how supremely adequate the craftsmanship to the end in view ! Some critics may choose to say that Swift rises higher in the scale of the literary art. Be it granted that he is far more literary. But need literature be " literary " in order to be great ?

As a stylist, of course, Swift carries the day. Defoe's object, indeed, is to appear not to have a distinctive style ; and what is distinctively his in pure style comes through in vividness of phrase rather than in sound or skill of construction. Defoe has the knack of the perfect phrase that seems no more than the happy accident of casual speech. By this means he gets his atmosphere, and, largely, his appearance of truth. Swift, on the other hand,

is as pure a stylist in prose as Pope in verse. No man has ever since written, sustainedly, such good English. No one's style has ever borne so well the burden of those parts of an argument which lack the added appeal of imparted emotion or stimulating idea. There is no model nearly as satisfactory for the modern writer whose aim is to write good English about ordinary things.

In comparison with his style, Swift's political ideas are uninteresting. He is here too negative to be great, and too conscious of folly to venture far. His general outlook is expressed most clearly in his *Sentiments of a Church-of-England Man*, written in 1708, in which he criticises both parties, but comes down firmly at the end on what may be called the reasoning Tory side. He is against absolutism in all its forms, " which, notwithstanding all that Hobbes, Filmer, and others have said to its advantage, I look upon as a greater evil than *anarchy* itself ; as much as a *savage* is in a happier state of life than a slave at the oar." He repudiates all idea of Divine Right, and defends the revolutionary settlement, which indeed he attributes largely to the Church. He denies that any form of government can claim divine sanction, and refers the entire question to expediency. He insists on a version of popular sovereignty, which places the ultimate authority in the *whole* of the people, but in such a way that this *whole* is not so understood as to involve a mere counting of heads. The

distinction between legislative power, "which in all governments must be absolute and unlimited," and executive power, which is secondary and derivative, he regards as vital. "The administration cannot be placed in too few hands, nor the legislation in too many."

So far, we might almost deem Swift a Whig; but his practical conclusions approximate more to Toryism. The State must, in his view, defend the Church. Some toleration there must be; for the stamping out of Dissent is not practical politics, and an evil that must be allowed to exist is better recognised. But toleration must extend only to sects already too strong to be disturbed, and must not allow the right to proselytise. Moreover, Dissenters should be excluded from all offices, and the toleration of "occasional conformity" should be withdrawn. These Church ideas make him the inevitable ally of Toryism, despite his dislike of Rome.

Finally, Swift's view, like Pope's, is that the forms of government are relatively unimportant; and he goes on to urge that what saves or damns the State is purity or corruption of manners. "Few states are ruined by any defect in their institution, but generally by the corruption of manners, against which the best institution is no longer a security, and without which a very ill one may subsist and flourish."

In the *Sentiments* we have Swift, with a great

show of cool judgment, writing down his ultimate view of political affairs, in language that often recalls that of another great stylist, Halifax. But Swift's moderation is in theory, while Halifax applies his more consistently to practice. Swift's ultimate standard is the safety of the Church, that of Halifax the tranquillity of the State.

Commonly, Swift's political writing, as it deals with practice rather than theory, does not show this note of moderation. His *Modest Proposal* to deal with the overplus of poor children in Ireland by converting them into succulent dishes for the tables of the landlords, " who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children," is far more in his peculiarly mordant, ironic vein. It provokes comparison with Defoe's *Shortest Way*. But Defoe meant to be taken seriously—that was his way of humour—whereas Swift of course did not. Defoe's irony ridicules : Swift's bites. And, if Defoe had written *The Drapier's Letters*, they would have been written as the Drapier might have composed them—better, but in the same sort ; whereas Swift's Drapier writes as only a man of the first culture could write. His language and style are perfectly simple ; but they do not attempt imitation. They remain his own, undisguised. They are, I think, the best of all his political work, largely because their aim is not merely cynical. They are no better written than the rest of his pamphlets ;

but they do not, like the political parts of *Gulliver's Travels*, and much of his occasional writing, leave a nasty taste in the mouth.

In the political circles of the day, Swift's chief antagonists were Steele and Addison ; for Defoe, though an enemy, was outside the closed circle of the politically elect. Steele's *Crisis* has often been held up as a model of political writing ; but it is, I think, over-rated. Both he and Addison were far more at home in the social or purely literary, than in the political, essay. The *Spectators* and *Tatlers* are admirable models of skilled and easy writing ; and the Roger de Coverley papers especially are a little masterpiece of social personification. But, in the strictly political sphere, Swift, as a controversial writer, beat his adversaries every time. They were too diffuse, too light in the hand, and maybe, a little too honest intellectually, to meet him on equal terms. Yet to rank well below Swift is, in their case, also to rank high.

Pope dedicated his *Essay on Man* to Bolingbroke ; and not only contemporary, but much later opinion placed the author of *The Patriot King* on a lofty pedestal. He was much lauded as great in the arts of writing and political thought alike. But who reads—who can endure to read—Bolingbroke now ? His thought is specious, pretentious, and confused ; and his style has precisely the same qualities. In both, he is perpetually straining after effect ; and in both he achieves only a blur. The

idea behind *The Patriot King* is no more than the simple assertion that a great and virtuous man may, without the aid of Divine Right, effectively lead a nation, if he have but upon him, and wear with seemly dignity, the trappings of royalty. But this idea is decked out with a bedizenment of words and rhetorical phrases that leaves it no room to breathe. Bolingbroke upholsters his thought : he seeks words not to express it, but to adorn. The reader moves through his pages as through the crowded salons of a vainglorious *nouveau riche*.

Yet Bolingbroke had great influence, both in his day and after. Disraeli, in English so bad as to pass into otherness and achieve an effect all its own, adapted Bolingbroke's ideas to the changed conditions of the nineteenth century. There is much of Bolingbroke in *Coningsby* and *Lothair* ; but there is also much that was far beyond Bolingbroke's range. In the eighteenth century, *The Patriot King* did much to inspire the machinations of the " King's Men " whom Burke turned to rend in his *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*. Nor is this influence unnatural. Before any form of democracy, or even the rule of the middle classes, had become a political possibility, royalism was the natural resort of those who hated the aristocratical domination of the great Whig houses. Defoe had foreshadowed the government of the country in accordance with *bourgeois* ideas ; but even he did not suppose that the *bourgeois* could actually

rule. Either the King or the Whigs might be driven to rule more and more in the interest of the *bourgeoisie* ; but the actual tenure of authority seemed to lie, in the eighteenth century, clearly between these two.

Bolingbroke did indeed perceive, like Disraeli later, that if the King was to rule, without the sanction of Divine Right or any despotic claim, he must find somewhere in the people the basis of his power. If he tried to rule with the aid of the oligarchy, the power would belong to them and not to him. His natural resource was to seek elsewhere a counterpoise to their influence. From this arises Bolingbroke's insistence on the need for the King to foster, by all means, the trade of his country, and to cultivate the support of the commercial interests. By Disraeli's time the situation had changed. The Whig oligarchs, unable to stand alone in face of the new power of the commercial and moneyed interests, had sought first to base their continued authority on the support of these interests, and, latterly, to share authority with them as the sole means of survival. The Whigs and the " Liberals " were in process of becoming identified : Victorian Liberalism was already swelling in the womb of the mother of Parliaments. Accordingly, when Disraeli sought a counterpoise to Whig-Liberal power, he had to seek it in the mass of the people, and to proclaim a new monarchy based on the support of the many

poor. *Sybil* is very different from *The Patriot King* : and yet they are the eighteenth- and the nineteenth-century variations on a common theme.

From Bolingbroke the mind passes naturally to Burke, the great upholder and chief philosopher of the Whig ascendancy. The two have, among many differences, two things in common—rhetoric and the conception of politics as an art of leading the people. But in Burke the great Whig families have usurped the place of the Patriot King : oligarchy and not monarchy embodies the national tradition. And, whereas in Bolingbroke the central idea staggers, unsupported by any clear or comprehensive social philosophy, in Burke the foundations are set deep in a tradition, and the superstructure rises magnificently, with an assured grouping of detail about the central tower. Bolingbroke's style is rhetorical because it must use rhetoric to hide the vagueness of the thought ; Burke's because rhetoric is for him the vehicle of a deep and sustained emotion. This is not to say that Burke was right, or Bolingbroke wrong : that is not the point. What is meant is that Bolingbroke was a *poseur* and a charlatan, while Burke, right or wrong, was indubitably sincere.

It is not necessary to waste words on the view that Burke, at some time during his life, underwent a fundamental change of attitude, or, having been on the " liberal " side, became afterwards a " con-

servative." Any such view is based on a sheerly anachronistic misunderstanding. The social philosophy and attitude of the *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* and of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* are essentially the same : the difference is in the problems and the times and not in Burke's opinions. There is nothing, save the added passion born of far greater events, in the *Reflections* that was not present by implication in the *Present Discontents*.

Burke's attitude is, in its outlines, simple. A healthy society needs above all two things—a living and continuous tradition and a governing class in which that tradition is embodied and conserved. Society has a life extending beyond the immediate present, or the lives of those who compose it at any particular time. The social tradition is more valid and more real than the body of the subjects ; and men cannot without disaster attempt to govern their fellow-men by the unaided light of reason. Rationalism is a political curse : the use of reason in politics is to serve the tradition, and not to question it. But the mass of men can never be trusted to observe the tradition faithfully : the vulgar will be always at the mercy of demagogues on the one hand or agents of despotism on the other, who seek to pervert or cajole it into error. The remedy lies in the secure authority of a governing class, firmly rooted in its control of the property and the culture of society, and therefore fully repre-

sentative of its better self. Any attack on the authority of this class is a blow delivered at the national security, because it threatens the continuity of the national tradition. At one time the enemy may be the Court, at another those who have established an ascendancy over the lower orders. Against both the full force of society must be launched without mercy ; for, if the tradition is broken, then, in the terms of an earlier age, the social compact is dissolved.

In 1770, when Burke published his *Thoughts on the Cause of Present Discontents*, the threat to the oligarchical tradition seemed to come from the " King's friends." It is not to be supposed that Burke had any love for Wilkes, whose Radicalism had in it the seeds of a far more dangerous onslaught on Whiggism than ever came from the circle round George III. But the issue that was at stake in the Middlesex Election seemed to Burke to be vital ; for if a Parliament subject to Government influence could not only unseat a candidate whom the electors had chosen, but also put in his place a candidate whom they had rejected, the sovereignty of Parliament was well on the way to substituting itself for the sovereignty of that narrow electorate which had served so well on the whole the cause of the great Whig houses. Parliament, under the influence of the King's Men, could be corrupted for the time : the safety of the State depended in the last resort on an electorate

so chosen as to secure the representation of the weight and substance of the nation. Crown influence in elections was intolerable corruption ; but the influence of the Whig oligarchs was the best guarantee of a rightly balanced political system. Thus it was that before 1789 the arch-Whig often wore the superficial appearance of a defender of popular liberties.

After 1789 the main current of political affairs was radically changed. The challenge to the national tradition came now from the popular side. To the doctrine and practice of royal privilege succeeded the earth-shattering notion of the " Rights of Man." The tradition was threatened now not merely with corruption, but actually with complete extinction. It was not in the least true, as Paine wrote, that Burke " pitied the plumage, and forgot the dying bird." The fate of the French aristocrats moved him so deeply not because they were men and women, but because they were aristocrats. The coloured plumage of the French nobility was, to his mind, the outward and visible sign of the true life of the nation. The bird of national tradition could not live without its plumage. Both Burke and Paine were concerned with the bird itself ; but their eyes were fixed upon two different birds. For Paine the life of France was the life of its ordinary men and women : for Burke the tradition was far more alive than any number of mere human beings.

With Burke, political philosophy makes its triumphant return to the stage of current political controversy. After Locke the two had gone different ways ; for Bolingbroke is too weak a link to hold them together. Defoe, Swift, Addison and the rest write of political affairs with little or no reference to the universal principles of political association. Burke could not write even an occasional pamphlet without lifting current controversy into the realm of philosophical speculation. Largely, no doubt, the change was in the times. The issues of the earlier eighteenth century did not raise the ultimate questions. The general form of government was practically settled : the questions in dispute were, by comparison, matters of detail or, at any rate, of practical judgment. The American and, far more, the French Revolution raised questions of a totally different order, and drove men back to the first principles of which they had grown tired after the exhausting struggles of the previous century. Burke, no doubt, would have gone back to first principles in any case ; for it was his temper to see even the smallest things by the illumination of great ideas. But, if circumstances had not once more forced the great issues to the front, neither could his eloquence have been half so passionate nor his influence a tenth part as great as it became.

Burke was essentially an orator ; and his prose is throughout the prose of rhetoric. We come

back with him, not only from details to first principles, but also from the written to the spoken word. The prose of the generations after 1688 had lost for the most part, as we have seen, the quality of sound : it was written to be read, and not to be read aloud, or even thought into sound by the reader. Burke's prose, on the other hand, lives by the noise it makes. His pamphlets are, in this respect, no less orations than his actual speeches. This does not mean that Burke was himself technically an accomplished speaker ; for in neither poetry nor prose is the art of writing the same as the art of elocution. But Burke's prose is of a quality that you cannot read, however silently, without hearing it ; and in its changing rhythms of sound is half its passion and more than half its appeal.

As a writer, Burke is at his best when he is most deeply moved. And he is far more moved by great issues than by personal passions. As literature, the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and his later pamphlets against the Revolution contain his best writing. And they find him at his best because the rich colouring of his style is apt to overwhelm any save the greatest subject-matter.

In his judgment on the greatest happening of his own day Burke was utterly and disastrously wrong. He, above all others, shares with Pitt the blame of having led the panic rush of the

English oligarchy against, not only Jacobinism, but every manifestation of the new spirit in English society. He above all roused the propertied classes to wage war upon both revolutionary France and radical England, and made himself the prophet of the English reaction. Yet in all this he was strictly consistent with his own principles. He became a reactionary, not because he had changed his views, but because a changing world had made his ideas obsolete. Not inconstancy, but inelasticity is Burke's great weakness in his political thought.

This weakness obscured Burke's virtues for the generations which followed him. But it no longer obscures them to-day. We are far enough off the controversies in which Burke was arrayed on the reactionary side to be able to appreciate the abiding qualities of his thought, without being put off by his occasional misjudgment. Burke lives in political thought as the apostle, not of oligarchy, but of the reality and value of political continuity and tradition. He thought the two to be inseparable : we have learned to think of them apart. We can recognise the value of his insistence on the part which tradition plays in the life of society—"Our Social Heritage," as Graham Wallas has called it in the title of one of his books—without supposing that this tradition needs must be enshrined in the authority of a dominant class. Even so, continuity is a dangerous gospel ; and Burke's

static view badly needs the corrective of a dynamic interpretation of social continuity. But, given this, Burke's vision lives. Hardly anyone will now deny what he was chiefly concerned to affirm—that the life of a society is not merely the sum of the lives of the individuals who compose it, and that any view which is based upon the idea of the isolated individual acting in accordance with the dictates of his own reason is fatally untrue to the realities of politics and of political association.

When Burke appealed from the New to the Old Whigs he spanned a gulf far wider than that which parted Locke from Milton or even from Hooker. The French Revolution stirred the waters of English thought far more deeply than our own Revolution of 1688, or even than our civil conflicts of the earlier part of the century. It went back further into first principles, and it drew from them more universal and subversive deductions. A king's head was almost the least thing that fell in revolutionary France : it was almost the greatest in Cromwellian England. 1789 begins a new age, both in the minds of men and in the configuration of the political world. Burke, planted firmly in the older tradition, hurled therefrom his thunderbolts at the new. The new ideas were past his understanding, because he was capable of judging them only by the old standards. That is why, although this chapter ends on the eve of 1789, Burke's

later as well as his earlier thought has been brought within its scope. He belongs to the old tradition ; and his *Reflections* are its funeral oration. Those who sought to answer him belonged rather to the new world, and may fitly serve for the opening of a new chapter.

IV

THE AGE OF REVOLUTIONS

Few books can ever have produced so great a storm of controversy as Burke's *Reflections*. There were plenty of other books and pamphlets in which the revolutionary cause was denounced with equal fervour ; but Burke's onslaught simply eclipsed the rest, and drew upon him the full fire of all opponents, as well as the universal applause of all conservatives. John Bowles, the two Giffords, and many other writers, including no less a man than William Cobbett, have left anti-Jacobin tracts which are still read by historians ; but from Burke's own day to this his work has been recognised as the quintessential expression of the conservative case. No one book can claim a corresponding distinction on the other side. Among the host of answers which Burke's outburst provoked, two stood forward above the rest in his own day, and still stand forward in ours. These are Paine's *Rights of Man* and Godwin's *Political Justice*. But besides these there are others that deserve not to be quite forgotten. Sir James Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Gallicae*, once famous, is now as dead as mutton ; but Mary Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Man*

has gained more praise from the modern world than it received from contemporaries, and John Thelwall, though few read him to-day, survives in a few quotations and might deservedly survive in more.

The French Revolution, completing what the Revolution in America had already begun, changed the terms of political controversy in England. In the *North Briton*, in the *Letters of Junius*, and even in the *Present Discontents*, the issues at stake are secondary and, though they may involve some appeal to first principles, do not actually turn upon them. The *Present Discontents*, stripped of its trappings, is little more than an incident in the struggle of two rival factions for power within an accepted system whose foundations are regarded as secure. Burke, of course, feels that far more than this is at stake, and seeks to refer the occasional conflict to the arbitrament of abiding principles of social well-being. But even he, though he may raise his own book to the level of his thought, cannot lift up the controversy itself to the same height. The more radical contributions to the Wilkes controversy scarcely make the attempt. The *North Briton* has no claim to either literary or philosophical merit ; and even the highly skilled craftsmanship of the *Letters of Junius* does not attempt to soar above the occasion. Junius hits hard ; but his blows are not mortal. He does not run his opponent through the heart : he only

knocks him out of the ring, leaving him to get well and to fight again another day. But the blows dealt out in the great controversy between Burke and the English Jacobins were meant to kill ; for on both sides the struggle was felt as one of life and death.

The American Revolution undoubtedly prepared the way for this change of temper. But it did not leave the issues plain or clearly defined. A matter in which Burke was ranged on the same side with Price and Paine must either have stopped short of first principles, or have had in it more than a little ambiguity. A reading of Burke's American speeches and letters on the one hand, and of Paine's *Commonsense* and *American Crisis*, and Richard Price's *Observations on Civil Liberty* on the other, makes the position plain. In Burke's mind, the issues at stake in the American War were, first, the denial to the American community of liberties which were an essential element in the tradition of British citizenship, and secondly the threatened destruction of an imperial unity which rested on a natural kinship and political connection. The Empire was, in Burke's view, a real unity with an interior division into certain component parts. Each part had equal claims and political rights within the whole. Burke's conception was oligarchical ; but it was inconsistent altogether with despotism. The arbitrary rule of the English oligarchs over the Americans was despotic.

America could rightly claim her share in the constitution of the imperial oligarchy.

Burke's protest against the British conduct of American affairs was thus directed primarily against despotism. But with this protest was combined another against the wanton breaking of the natural unity of the British and American peoples. These two principles carried him as far as Paine and Price were carried in opposition to British government policy ; but he travelled to different conclusions and by a different route. For in Price's pamphlet, and still more in Paine's American writings, the issues are conceived in quite another way. For them, the fundamental question is that of the entire basis of government. The matter in dispute is not whether the Americans have a right, in Burke's phrase, to a share in the constitution of Great Britain, but whether they have a right to frame their forms and methods of government absolutely as they choose. For Paine, the question goes back to the absolute and inalienable rights of man ; and his answer to the American problem, as later to the issues raised by the Revolution in France, is conceived in terms of the original and unalterable equality of all men before God. Burke's ground of complaint is that the Americans are being deprived of their share in the blessings of an oligarchical constitution : Paine's is that they are not allowed, democratically, to frame a constitution for themselves.

The American crisis left these two vitally different groups of issues tangled inextricably together—for it could be conceived in terms of either : the French Revolution instantly disentangled them, and left Burke and Paine in the sharpest possible opposition, and Paine full of troubled wonder at Burke's seeming apostasy. It is not the case that the French Revolution brought first principles and fundamental human rights back into the realm of political speculation in England. The American Revolution had done that already. But the events in France did drive all controversialists back to these first principles, and did sharply distinguish mere protests against tyranny from positive assertions of an ultimate democratic faith. The principles of 1688 had never been forgotten. In gatherings like those of the Revolution Society and in Dissenting pulpits and seminaries up and down the country, they had been celebrated in some degree without a break, and with conscious appeal to the great controversies of the earlier seventeenth century. But they had dropped into the byeways of political life ; and the tradition had lived on for the most part outside the circles of Parliament and polite letters. The American crisis brought them back to the highroads ; but their presence was not clearly seen and distinguished until the lesson of the Declaration of Independence had been reinforced by the fall of the Bastille and the far more challenging *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme*

et du Citoyen. Then at length was the πύρινος πόλεμος of human reason renewed ; and then were all men compelled to take sides in a conflict of faiths which left no aspect of life unchallenged or above the battle.

Liberty was the proclaimed watchword of the Revolutions in both America and France. But the word stood, in the two cases, largely for different things. Both were fighting against arbitrary rule ; but in the one case the liberty demanded was primarily that of the community from external control, and in the other that of the individual from arbitrary government and oppression. This contrast is, of course, too sharp ; for the foundation of the American Republic involved a declaration of individual rights, and the new constitution of France was based on an assertion of popular sovereignty. But, despite this mingling of the streams, the essential difference remains. The Americans made a republic as the only means of escape from arbitrary external rule, and then set about defining and safeguarding the liberties of the individual. The French reacted against internal oppression, and then set about defining the true function and scope of their reorganised State.

Because of this difference, while the conception of liberty was common to both revolutions, the conception of equality, vital in the case of France, was in the American Revolution only incidental. Washington's views were as aristocratic as Burke's ;

and, if Jefferson proclaimed a different view under the influence of the French *philosophes* of pre-revolutionary days, and if much of the spirit of the seventeenth century had survived among the descendants of Puritan emigrants, still no appeal to human equality was common to the body of the American revolutionary leaders. Hamilton's *Federalist* is not, like Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social*, a bible of democratic doctrine.

It was the work of the French philosophers and the French Revolution to make the gospel of human equality the main issue of political thought and practice. But this gospel itself could be conceived in two quite different ways. It could be, as Rousseau conceived it, a doctrine of popular sovereignty and the all-power of the General Will, or, as Tom Paine conceived it and the revolutionary declaration expressed it, a gospel of the Rights of Man. It could base itself either on an alleged natural order of the universe, from which certain fundamental human rights could be infallibly derived, or on the unaided power of the human reason, regarded as the common possession of all men, and the symbol of their equality.

In England, Paine became the exponent of the Rights of Man, while William Godwin proclaimed the unlimited authority of reason. The former idea, though it came back to England by way of France, harks back to the controversies of the seventeenth century. Natural Rights are a re-

incarnation of the Natural Law, which seventeenth-century disputants had postulated and interpreted in diverse ways to suit their needs. Price, in his famous sermon *On the Love of Our Country*, which was the occasion, if not the cause, of Burke's *Reflections*, appeals to Milton, Locke, Sidney and Hoadly in England, as well as to Montesquieu, Marmontel and Turgot in France, as having "sowed a seed which has since taken root, and is now growing up to a glorious harvest" in the events of 1789. The Rights of Man, conceived as Natural Rights embedded in the Law of Nature, were nothing new in English political speculation, even if the case for them was now newly expressed. They were implicit in the older controversies: indeed, the invocation of them under the new conditions was, as Godwin clearly saw, largely an attempt to clothe fresh projects in familiar garments.

It has often been argued that Rousseau, in particular, cannot have been among the real inspirers of the revolutionary leaders in France because they asserted their claims in terms of the Rights of Man, whereas Rousseau based his on the Social Contract and the General Will. The Rights of Man necessarily negative the absolute authority of the State; but the essence of Rousseau's argument is that popular sovereignty is, by its very nature, unlimited and illimitable. The very name of the French manifesto—*Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*—points to the attempt to fuse in one

definition of principle the two warring ideas. The French leaders did want to proclaim at one and the same time that there were absolute human rights which the State must defend, and that there were no limits to its authority. Rousseau had escaped the difficulty by denying the existence, in society, of specific individual rights, and by limiting not the authority of the State, but only the desirability of its exercise. But the practical leaders could not dispense with the appeal to particular rights, which had behind it a long tradition and was deeply rooted in the consciousness of the people. Their reasons were with Rousseau ; but their sentiments were with the tradition—and sentiment is an ally without which reason can hardly prosper in the conduct of human affairs.

In England, where no need, born of victory, to make a new constitution compelled an uneasy fusion of the two bodies of doctrine, they remained more largely apart. Paine caught the popular consciousness and became, for the " swinish multitude," the interpreter of revolutionary principles ; and at the same time Price and Priestley carried, mainly on the same grounds of rights and sentiments, a large body of Dissenting support. Godwin, on the other hand, using the reason of man as the sole illuminant of the dark places of politics, carried the young intelligentsia, and made the Revolution, in their minds, the symbol of reason against authority.

The " Pantisocracy " of young Coleridge and

Southey breathed this spirit of pure reason—not the more traditional air of the Rights of Man. The Pantisocrats wanted, with Godwin, to go not back, but forward, to first principles. The Revolution was for them above all a break with the past and its traditions, and a leap forward into the fresh air of absolute freedom. Price was thinking of 1649 and 1688 : their thoughts were in the coming millennium. Wordsworth's *Prelude*, far more clearly than any prose treatise, reveals the mental state of the young apostles of French principles and Godwinian reason :

> " Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very Heaven ! "

The French Revolution was the dawn of a new day ; and reason was its sun.

> " O times,
> In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
> Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
> The attraction of a country in romance !
> When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights
> When most intent on making of herself
> A prime enchantress—to assist the work,
> Which then was going forward in her name ! "

For Wordsworth, then, as for Godwin himself, the Rights of Man were but as a speck in the illimitable air of reason. For rights are of their nature finite ; but reason seemed infinite.

In the minds of most men, this vision faded soon. For some, it was drowned in the blood of the Terror ; for many more it died gradually away as France, ringed round by enemies, turned from inchoate democracy to military despotism, and from a war of revolutionary defence to one of imperialism and world conquest. Napoleon destroyed in Europe much that was old and bad and rotten ; but he destroyed as well the power of his country to inspire men to democratic passion. Hazlitt, indeed, remained to praise the War-Lord as he had praised the young Republic. Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth turned disillusioned to the service of other gods.

English Radicalism, then, found expression, on the morrow of the French Revolution, in two distinct gospels. And of these Godwin's was, in reality, by far the more radical. In making Reason an absolute monarch, he was *plus royaliste que le roi*. Paine's proclamation of human equality and the Rights of Man led him, in practice, only to a moderate programme of social reform. The *Second Part* of *The Rights of Man* sets forth this programme. Education and employment for all, provision for the sick and aged, allowances for children at birth, progressive taxation and agrarian and financial reform—these are Paine's practical deductions from the universal principles proclaimed in the *First Part*. But the conclusion of Godwin's argument is anarchism ; for if reason is to be man's

only guide, there can be no case or room for coercion of any sort, such as all government must involve. The progress of reason is the growth of anarchy ; for all men will obey the dictates of reason if they but know what they are, and action that is forced is a denial of reason. Godwin does, indeed, assert strongly the need for practical caution in moving towards his goal ; but his goal is the utter abolition of all governmental institutions. And, as his object is not to outline a practical programme, but to place the whole controversy on the plane of absolute principle, his practical cautions are lost in the immensity of his philosophical generalisation.

It is impossible to recapture to-day the mood in which the young intelligentsia of 1793 read Godwin's *Political Justice*. Paine's *Rights of Man* lives by the clear vividness of its writing, the simplicity of its appeal, the warm passion behind it, as well as by the singular felicity of its outstanding phrases. It is still an eminently readable book—scarcely a masterpiece, but an enduring political classic. *Political Justice*, on the other hand, is now in bulk almost unreadable, though it contains many excellent passages. Trusting to reason absolutely, it eschews passion, and seeks to convince throughout by the bare and uncoloured force of argument. Its style is clear, but flat and unmusical : it makes no appeal to sound. That Godwin could write far better appears in *Caleb Williams* and others of his novels, and sometimes

in his historical works. But in *Political Justice* he will have no meretricious adornments. Everything is as bare and plain, and almost as ugly, as a Calvinist Chapel.

There is, indeed, in Godwin's character and attitude much of the ascetic. His book, like mankind, must live by reason alone ; and Reason is a jealous god, who will admit no other gods to his temple. Brought up in the strictest sect of Dissent, though he discarded many of its doctrines, Godwin kept not a few of its inhibitions. The exercise of reason was, to his mind, the supreme human adventure ; and it so dominated him that he needed neither adventures nor relaxations besides. Godwin, as an old man, cadging money from his son-in-law, Shelley, is a sad descent from the austere philosopher of *Political Justice* ; and Godwin's later writings clearly show that, when the light of absolute reason grew dim, he had no other illumination to put in its place. Godwin, as well as Godwinism, ran to seed.

But, before the Godwinian doctrine died, it underwent, at the hands of Shelley, a splendid reincarnation. In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley transmuted the doctrine of universal reason into the gospel of universal love.

> " Common as light is love,
> And its familiar voice wearies not ever.
> Like the wide heaven, the all-sustaining air,
> It makes the reptile equal to the God :

They who inspire it most are fortunate,
As I am now : but those who feel it most
Are happier still, after long sufferings,
As I shall soon become."

In Godwin's dry prose, reason walked by its own light : Shelley taught reason to move the world by the power of love. In place of the universal enlightenment, he made the love of man for every living thing the bond of association and the clue to happiness. Godwin's millennium was the age when all things were known to all men : Shelley's, the age when love purged away all cruelties, including the cruelties of superior wisdom uninspired by love. Prometheus was the giver of wisdom, chained to the rock for countless ages, as the punishment for his gift to men, and doomed to unremitted pain until love set him and all things free.

" Conquest is dragged captive through the deep :
Love, from its awful throne of patient power
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour
Of dead endurance, from the slippery, steep,
And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs
And folds over the world its healing wings."

For an answer to Burke that equalled the *Reflections* in literary power, the world had to wait for Shelley ; and the author of *Prometheus* was not of the first revolutionary generation, nor was his work

political in any narrow sense. It belongs, however, to this study of political literature, and to this place in it, for two reasons. *Prometheus Unbound* is essentially a reinterpretation of the Godwinian doctrine ; and that doctrine is itself a theory, not of politics alone, but of life. Neither in France nor in its reactions upon England was the French Revolution purely a political movement. Equally with the Renaissance, it embodied a new attitude to all human problems. Both Godwin's and Shelley's politics are a part of their philosophies of life : they judge all questions of the mind in the light of a single principle. Shelley has often been sneered at as a mere foolish visionary in politics by those who pay tribute to his poetry ; but the two cannot be thus sharply divided. Shelley's politics are woven into the texture of his poetry ; and his poetry springs out of the same attitude to life as his politics. When he wrote :

> " I met Murder on the way :
> He had a mask like Castlereagh,"

he was not expressing a mere unreasoning and disconnected political prejudice, but a conviction that came from the heart of his vision of life. Castlereagh and Eldon and their like symbolised for him just that power that kept the Titan bound on his rock of pain. There was in them hate, born of fear, and no love. They chained humanity,

body and soul : they were the Furies that were sent to tear the Titan's suffering flesh.

It is not here suggested that Shelley was a great political thinker. Obviously, that was not his business. But it is equally certain that he was no mere impracticable fool, who ought to have kept clear of politics. If he had kept clear of them, the world would have lost *Prometheus* as well as *The Masque of Anarchy* ; and while the former counts, of course, by far the more, I at any rate would not willingly want either.

Godwin and Shelley take a lofty stand. Godwin's wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, was content to remain nearer earth. But the simple indignation of her reply to Burke lives yet, when many treatises of more philosophical pretension have been forgotten. And her reply is notable for finding at once the weakest joint in Burke's armour. " Security of property ! " she writes. " Behold, in a few words, the definition of English liberty ! " She went straight to the point that all Burke's rhetoric had really obscured. Not that Burke had aimed primarily at the defence of property for the sake of the rich : but the dominance of the propertied classes did seem to him the only sure and enduring basis for English society. It was the most vital element of the tradition. Hereditary property, Mary Wollstonecraft pointed out, was the main foundation of human inequality ; and the same nominal rights meant very different things to rich

and poor. When others were waving their standards on which were inscribed the watchwords of "Reason" and "Liberty," her small clear voice sought to remind them that the real foundation of most human suffering was the poverty of the common people. Godwin, too, inveighed against the rights of property ; but he never put with his wife's simple directness the elementary human case against the so unequal distribution of wealth.

In the half dozen years that followed the Revolution in France, the great controversy in which Burke and Paine and Godwin were the protagonists raged amain. Nor did it rage in book and pamphlet alone. These were the years in which the Corresponding and Constitutional Societies raised their heads, the years of the counter-propaganda of John Reeves and his "Loyal Associations," the years of the great Whig schism that followed the Revolution, and left Charles James Fox as the leader of a forlorn and dispirited remnant of Whigs who had been proof against Burke's pleadings. They were, moreover, the years during which Pitt held England at war with revolutionary France, and turned, under cover of war necessities and governing-class panic, to the savage repression of Radicalism at home. The Constitutional Society went down at his first onslaught ; and, after a few more years of troubled existence, the Corresponding Societies, firstfruits of working-class organisation in Great Britain, also succumbed. Radical organisation of

all kinds was crushed out, to recover at all only when men's tempers wore thin as the new century advanced and the war was still prolonged. Nor was Radical organisation Pitt's only victim : Radical opinion felt his hand almost as heavy upon it. Precariously, it kept a weak hold upon small sections of the artisan and lower middle classes ; but the intelligentsia deserted it, and both the Rights of Man and the universal reason fell equally out of fashion. The one leader who kept on ceaselessly with his Radical preaching right through the period of war and repression was old Major Cartwright ; and on him the French Revolution had exercised no influence. He had been saying just the same things long before 1789 as he went on saying to the end of his long life. He belongs to the old tradition, like Richard Price, harking back to 1688, to the Puritans, and to the free constitution of an Old England placed somewhere in a not too precisely dated golden past. In the history of English Radicalism John Cartwright is one of the noblest figures ; but he can find no secure place in this essay, for few political writers were ever gifted with a less fortunate literary style. Some of his contemporaries presumably managed to read *England's Ægis* and his other books : the modern reader who is no specialist will have had quite enough if he gets through a mere pamphlet—*Take Your Choice*, the earliest and the best of " the old Major's " Radical writings.

Few besides Cartwright kept Radical principles alive through the long war ; and, when the revival came, its tone and temper were essentially different from those of the agitations which Burke had denounced and Pitt suppressed. The new Radicalism was slow to make its appeal to either imprescriptable rights or universal laws of reason : it was far less a political philosophy than a passionate protest against abuses that were largely economic. Year by year, the wealth of England had been drained away into the bottomless morass of war commitments. Money and not men beat Napoleon ; and England was Europe's paymaster in the struggle. It is true that the more Pitt and his successors reaped the golden harvest, the thicker and stronger the new crops of taxable capacity seemed to grow ; for the years of war were also the vital years of the Industrial and Agrarian Revolutions. These alone enabled England to throw an endless supply of men and resources into the struggle ; but the draining away of the new wealth, as fast as it was created, to pay for the war meant a heavy aggravation of misery at home. The land, enclosed and concentrated in the power of the richer landlords, might yield a greater economic return ; but the labourer starved amid the growing productivity of the work of his hands, or subsisted miserably on a meagre allowance doled out to him more and more grudgingly by parish justices who mistook his famishing despair for the malevolence of Jacobin

principles. The new factories might turn out a yard of cloth in the twinkling of an eye ; but tax-gatherers who must find means to pay the costs of war, and employers who needed every penny they could lay hands on for the expansion of their business and the exploitation of the new machines, left but a scanty gleaning behind for the new proletarians of the factory towns ; while the hand-loom weavers were beaten down even lower by the remorseless competition of mechanical labour.

The first signs of the new Radicalism came from the field rather than the factory—for it was in the countryside that the revolution advanced most swiftly during the years of war. And the prophet of this agrarian Radicalism was William Cobbett—the greatest political journalist that England has produced. Cobbett's concern was not with the rights of men, but with their wrongs. Soon to be the leader of Radical agitation, he rose to fame first as a ferocious anti-Jacobin pamphleteer, a staunch champion of Pitt's war policy, a sturdy denouncer of all sorts of high-falutin Radical nonsense. His first political work was a furious onslaught on the Radical Unitarian, Joseph Priestley ; and the *Political Register*, which he was to make the most dreaded, and by far the most popular, organ of English Radical opinion, began its career as an anti-Jacobin journal, under the patronage of Burke's most faithful friend and political interpreter, William Windham.

Cobbett's conversion was a result, not of changing principles, but of simple reaction to facts. He had developed his anti-Jacobinism when he was in America, far away from his own people. The spectacle of conditions in England made him change his tune ; and within a few years of his return he had transferred his fulminations to the Radical side. But to the end of his life he was never a Radical on principle. He loved old things, and distrusted the unaided light of reason intensely. He hated Benthamite and Malthusian philosophers far more profoundly than the more traditional oppressors of the people. He loved to appeal to the past, and was for ever proclaiming that the people of England wanted nothing new, but only a restoration of their old liberties. Radical Reform of Parliament was for him a means and not an end ; not an inevitable deduction from the Rights of Man or the law of reason, but a means of redressing positive and intolerable grievances. His life-work was an instinctive human protest against the gross inhumanities and the terrible sufferings that he saw around him.

Luckily for the world, Cobbett was able to clothe this protest in a prose style of unmatched vigour and descriptive power. He had a seeing eye ; and whatever he saw he could make the readers of his *Register* see too. It is a small matter that he was on many points narrow-minded, always intensely egotistic, and in his particular inferences

often wrong. What counts is that he alone among his contemporaries was able to make men see the tragic face of England as it really was. Yet his writing is by no means all tragedy. Cobbett was naturally robust, buoyant, given to cheerfulness, and possessed of a keen faculty of appreciation for the things of nature. He paints the countryside as a lover, setting against it in all the sharper contrast the picture of a people "ragged as colts, and as pale as ashes."

It was always Cobbett's way to mingle his politics with everything that interested him. All his best writing is a blend of politics and autobiography and simple observation of the things around him. He chooses political allusions to season his *English Grammar*; and he loves to illustrate his points from no other source so well as from his own life. *Advice to Young Men* is not primarily political; but it is full of politics all the same. And *Rural Rides*, his greatest work by far, is composed of approximately equal parts of politics and description, with a strong dash of autobiography thrown in.

Thomas Carlyle called Cobbett "the pattern John Bull of his century, strong as the rhinoceros, and with singular humanities and genialities shining through his thick skin." This John Bullishness is, indeed, too evident to be missed; and with it goes a quality that is part of the secret of Cobbett's power and appeal. He wrote an English, very near to the spoken word, that anyone who could

read at all, of whatever social class, was readily able to appreciate. He says himself that he owed much to Swift as a stylist ; and perhaps the nearest parallel to Cobbett's *Addresses to the Journeymen and Labourers* is to be found in Swift's *Drapier's Letters*. But there is this difference. Swift seems to be writing from afar ; but the reader of Cobbett could feel that the master was almost standing by his side in real physical presence. Cobbett's egotism had this good side, that it imbued all his writing with an intimate personal quality. He had few reticences, and no more inhibitions than the heroine of *Gentlemen prefer Blondes*. He told his readers how he felt, even more than what he thought. Indeed, what he felt and what he thought were within close reach of being the same.

Cobbett's greatest service in his own day was that of putting heart of courage into the poor and oppressed. His force gave them confidence, which they needed most of all. He had not a great deal to offer them by way of positive programme ; for he could never bring himself to understand the new England that was growing up around him. Machinery made him feel uncomfortable : he was never so much at home in a factory town as at a gathering of labourers or a farmers' ordinary. And many of his onslaughts on the things he did not understand were little short of grotesque. There were, doubtless, sound reasons for disliking Brougham and Malthus, Ricardo and Birkbeck,

and most of the prophets of the new enlightenment. But Cobbett's holocaust of the fruits of the new science was positively absurd. It ill behoved so excellent a popular instructor as the author of *Cobbett's Grammar* to denounce all attempts at popular education with indiscriminate violence ; and it hardly followed, because the Government refused Catholic Emancipation, that the origin of all abuses was to be found in the Reformation settlement. Cobbett's generalisations were never *a priori* : his views were drawn from what he saw. But he was apt to draw from unmistakable premises somewhat startling and expansive conclusions.

It has been impossible to write of Cobbett without relating him, not only to movements and ideas which we have already discussed, but also to others of which no mention has been made as yet. Cobbett's standards, where they are not based purely on current observation, are rooted in the past. He looks back to Old England, and not forward to a new. But many of his shafts are discharged at new men and new doctrines whose rise was contemporary with his own. Rotten boroughs, sinecurists and placemen, enclosures and the National Debt were old abuses. Benthamism and " the dismal science " belonged rather to the new age, though they too had their origins further back. Cobbett lived to see Burke's admired oligarchy fall before the onrush of the new indus-

trialism. So far, the cause which he favoured carried the day. But with the new class and the new doctrines to whose victory he made a powerful contribution he had even less sympathy than with the old. His appeals to the "journeymen and labourers" had only seated in power the new employing classes and the "feelosofical villains" who were the theoretical interpreters of the new capitalist doctrine. Cobbett was even less a Utilitarian than an apostle of Godwin's Rationalism or of the Rights of Man. But Utilitarianism was destined to sweep both him and them aside. To its growth—to Benthamism in politics and Ricardianism in economic matters—we must next turn our attention.

V

THE DAWN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

We took, in the last two chapters, a series of leaps from Locke to Bolingbroke, from Bolingbroke to Burke, and from Burke to Godwin and Tom Paine. In following one line of political development in this fashion, we left aside another, certainly no less important, but destined to exert its full influence at a later stage. All save one of the writers studied in the last chapter had this in common—that they were seeking for some high and enduring principle that should serve as the true sanction of political society. This sanction might be found in the law of nature or the rights of man, or again in the inherent properties of the human reason. But some sanction, they felt, there must be. Burke, who dismissed both rights and reason as the foundation of the social bond, only erected the living tradition of societies into a metaphysical and half-mystical alternative.

The eighteenth century, however, was by no means exclusively occupied with speculations of this type. Indeed, thought of a very different order is even more characteristic of it. The

century that opened with Pope's well-satisfied platitudes about the nature of government prided itself above all, until the convulsions of its last decades overset its calm, on being the age of a plain and tranquil commonsense which denied the enthusiasms and the high-falutin political extravagances of its predecessor. Only harm had come of the attempts of the political Icarus to sail the skies : henceforward, he was told, he had better cleave closely to solid earth.

In Pope this negation of the need for enthusiasm took the form, not only of a denial that it was worth while to argue about ultimate political principles, but also that it was unwise, as well as impious, to question the merits of existing institutions. It is he who proclaims :

> " All nature is but art, unknown to thee ;
> All chance, direction, which thou canst not see ;
> All discord, harmony not understood ;
> All partial evil, universal good :
> And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
> One truth is clear, Whatever is, is right."

Mrs. Alexander only re-echoed the doctrine with a narrower application when she bade good Churchgoers sing :

> " The rich man in his castle,
> The poor man at his gate,
> God made them, high or lowly,
> And ordered their estate."

And still more pregnant with meaning for the future are the lines with which Pope rounds off the *Third Epistle* of his *Essay* :

> " Thus God and Nature linked the general frame,
> And bade Self-love and Social be the same."

This, of course, is mysticism, no less than Burke's tradition, or Rousseau's social contract, or Paine's rights of man. But it is mysticism wearing the garb of commonsense and humility. Man is adjured, not to search out the mystical principle, but to take it on trust, and to confine his practical speculations to matters well within the range of his mundane intellect. Within these limits the subtler he can be the better ; but his task is rather to put a finer polish on the diamonds he possesses than to dig up new. God made the world ; and, being good, He must have made it well. Man must walk according to His law expressed, not mainly in Scripture, but in the actual order of the world. The main issues are settled : the British Constitution, the existing distribution of wealth and power, the proportions in which pain and pleasure are meted out—all these are God's will, and part of His inscrutable purpose. Blackstone's demonstration that the British Constitution is the best of all possible constitutions does not stop short of Pope's maxim. " Everything," he writes, " is now as it should be," and we are left in no doubt

that this all-goodness is a direct consequence of the infinite goodness of God.

The logical deduction from this doctrine of a "natural harmony," whether it be derived from the will of God or the nature of the universe, is that man should, above all, abstain from interference. The philosophy of *laissez-faire* is implicit in it. But men in the earlier eighteenth century had not learnt to point the moral as it was to be pointed later by the economists. They applied it to the class divisions of Society and to the ordering of property and government, but not to matters of mercantile policy. Despite Hume's influence, Mercantilism was still alive for Adam Smith to destroy in 1776. This persistence of the idea of a "regulated trade," however, has somewhat obscured the major point. The economists were so far from inventing the idea of a "natural harmony," or even of first applying it to economic affairs, that, in the main, they only extended to the sphere of commerce what had been the characteristic attitude of their predecessors both to politics and to that vital part of economics and politics alike which deals with the distribution of wealth and the relations between class and class.

Men who took literally Pope's maxim that "Whatever is, is right" would have nothing left to do but to fold their arms and await the event. But, in fact, no man—or, at least, no politician—ever could take such a maxim literally. Practically,

what it comes to mean is that the politician should take all the really vital and fundamental things for granted, and concern himself solely with the details. *De minimis non curat Lex Dei* is his practical reservation, that must serve to justify his activities. In the name of God or Reason, he is content to be a political manipulator instead of a statesman. This attitude, always characteristic of the English lawyer-politician, was very highly developed in eighteenth-century political life. It is Burke's passionate denial of these limits, despite his repudiation of the claims of reason, that marks him out among the parliamentary figures of the century. Burke's was the only philosophical conservatism.

If, however, men are bidden, in the name of commonsense, to eschew the higher flights of political speculation and keep to the less dangerous paths of administrative problems, it is not easy in practice to confine commonsense within the prescribed boundaries. By this road, as the century advances, acquiescence turns into scepticism, and scepticism in its turn to the doctrine of expediency. Man is to take the major things for granted, and in minor matters is to keep clear of metaphysics and walk with the aid of commonsense alone. But why should he take the major things for granted? And, if commonsense is so useful a guide in minor matters, why should it not serve in major things as well? The idea of the divine or natural harmony survives, and continues to exert a powerful, and in

some spheres an increasing influence ; but it is more and more jostled by the utilitarian principle.

Jeremy Bentham is commonly claimed as the founder of the Utilitarian school ; and in a very real sense he was, for it was he who first pushed home the political implications of the principle of utility. His first maxim, " the greatest happiness of the greatest number," and his oft-repeated question " Are the probable mischiefs of doing this thing greater or less than the probable mischiefs of not doing it ? " embody the first thorough application of the principle of utility to every political institution and to every project. But Bentham invented neither the principle of utility nor the phrase " the greatest happiness of the greatest number." They go back far beyond him : the growth of the Utilitarian idea can be traced back a long way behind its embodiment in a comprehensive system of political thought. There is much of it in Francis Hutcheson, who influenced both Hume and Adam Smith ; it is the guiding principle of Hume's political writing, as well as intimately connected with his moral philosophy and his psychology ; and, among Bentham's contemporaries, it is dominant in Paley, though in him it is mingled with a great deal more theology than the Utilitarian school proper was ever able to stomach.

" Most people in this island," David Hume wrote in his *Essays*, " have divested themselves of all superstitious reverence to names and authority."

Hume is in practical matters a conservative ; but in theory his political attitude is almost wholly sceptical. Not only does he make short work of the Divine Right of Kings, which was dead already, and of the Original Contract, which was still to show itself very much alive : he looks on institutions as well as ideas with a sceptical regard which does away with all notions of reverence. In a negative sense, his attitude is almost wholly utilitarian ; but the principle of utility has not become in his work constructive as well as destructive. He anticipates Adam Smith in denouncing Mercantilism and proclaiming the underlying ideas of Free Trade ; and he can claim to be one of the first to make considerable use of that stand-by of the classical economists—the economic man. But when he asks the question " Is it worth while ? " his purpose is far more commonly to suggest that something should not, than that something should, be done. He is accordingly no Benthamite ; for Bentham's principle was applied to creative as well as destructive uses. And he is further most unlike Bentham in that from his iconoclasm of ideas he nearly always retreats upon a practical compromise leaning well on the side of authority. He wants a balance between order and liberty ; but, if the two come to a conflict, he is likelier to choose order. Balance —of power internationally, of authority in the State, of considerations in the mind—is what he values most. He would hardly have ventured to express

thoughts so subversive had he not written in so politically settled a time. Only in dealing with religion does he lose his commonsense attitude of moderation ; and that was because he held the religious to be singularly lacking in moderation and commonsense.

Hume's politics are, further, essentially relative. He does not believe that there is a single " best " valid for all times and places, or even that the ideal best for a particular time and place is the practical " best " as well. His approach to politics is psychological : he founds the need for government on the faults of human nature. And he stresses its experimental character : " The world," he says, " is still too young to fix many general truths in politics," with less than three thousand years of political experience behind it. Here is none of Bentham's critical dogmatism : Hume may be, in one sense, a philosophical utilitarian ; but he is certainly not a " Philosophic Radical."

Hume's iconoclasm loved, indeed, to play with less dangerous idols than those of current society. He would destroy ruthlessly something that belonged to the past, for which he had more than a little contempt mingled with his learning. As writer and thinker alike, he was above all the cultured sceptic of the Augustan Age. His literary judgments are of a piece with his philosophy. He held that no Englishman before Swift had written " polite prose." The prose of Bacon and

Milton he labelled as pedantic. Doubtless, his ideal was his own smooth, polite, temperate, expressive, but unpointed, way of writing.

Hume published his *Treatise of Human Nature* in 1739, and the first series of his *Essays* in 1742. Bentham's first important work, *A Fragment on Government*, did not appear until 1776, which was also the year of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Between Hume and Bentham comes Blackstone, to whose famous *Commentaries* the *Fragment* was a reply. Bentham's chief concern was not, indeed, with the *Commentaries* themselves, but with the introductory discourse which their author had prefixed to them. Blackstone had there brought forth, and decked out in a felicitous and imposing literary style, all the old concepts that Bentham hated most—the law of nature, the original contract (regarded, however, as a legal fiction rather than as an historical event), the ancient division of all constitutions into monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic ; and to this he had added, as we have seen, a picture of the British Constitution that was hardly calculated to appeal to the Radical mind.

Bentham's onslaught on Blackstone is by far the best of his works. The *Fragment on Government* lacks, indeed, those astonishing oddities of phrase, those cacophonous neologisms, those positive absurdities mingled with sound sense that are characteristic of his later writing. Even the footnotes are kept within bounds. The *Fragment* is

not a literary curiosity, but a straightforward piece of argument. It shows, already, its author's love of logic-chopping—his eager fastening on a phrase whose logical absurdity he sees how to expose. And it is full of those pungent phrases that everyone remembers because they sum up, at once aptly and queerly, the gist of an argument. Not there do we learn that "pushpin is as good as poetry"; but we do get the comparison of the social contract with a child's rattle, to amuse those who could think they need it.

Not much is left of Blackstone as a political theorist—though much may remain of him as a lawyer—when Bentham has done with him. Nor is the *Fragment on Government* purely a work of destruction. It enunciates, as clearly as anything Bentham ever wrote, the central Utilitarian position. This was worked out in far greater detail in his later writings, with the addition of the elaborate classification of pleasures—including, characteristically, a separate and distinct "pleasure of malevolence"—but the amplification added little to the inner substance of the doctrine. The calculus of pleasures and pains is implicit in this earlier and slighter work.

Having stamped on the Social Contract, Bentham was soon moved to turn his attention to the Rights of Man. Natural Rights, he said, were "simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptable rights rhetorical nonsense—nonsense upon stilts." He

was a thorough-going Radical ; but he would admit no mystical foundations for his Radicalism. Rejecting all authority and all *a priori* reasoning, he put forward his purely empirical test of truth and right. He did this, moreover, in a firm conviction that no problem worth solving was too difficult for men to solve. " The age we live in," he wrote, " is a busy age ; in which knowledge is rapidly advancing towards perfection." He saw mechanical science and invention advancing by swift strides ; and he wanted political science and political invention to adopt their methods. Bentham and Godwin both appealed to reason ; but Godwin's reasoning started from first principles, while Bentham's aimed at building sound principles out of experience.

There is in this attitude nothing essentially akin to the doctrine of *laissez-faire*. Bentham's adherence to *laissez-faire* was, indeed, purely pragmatical. His " greatest happiness principle " bade the State act in some things, and let alone in others. But the things the State was doing badly obtruded themselves on his attention far more than the good things it was omitting to do. Practically, his first aim was to get men to clear away the heaps of traditional rubbish which fouled both their thought and their actions. His *Defence of Usury* is not fundamentally a defence of usury, but a pertinent inquiry whether the laws against it were of any practical use. His demand for legal reform was primarily not humanitarian, but based on a

commonsense perception that the laws as they stood produced much misery and depravity without equivalent social gain. His case for the Radical Reform of Parliament was based, not on the right of any man to have a vote, but on the muddle that the unreformed Parliament was making of its business. Does it work well—as well as this or that possible alternative? Does it cause as much pleasure and as little pain as possible to those concerned with it—each counting as one and none as more than one? These are Bentham's reiterated questions; and, asked about most of the institutions of his own day, they led to exceedingly radical and iconoclastic answers.

Thus the "greatest happiness" principle of Bentham and the *laissez-faire* doctrines of the new economists were woven together, for the time, into a single movement. James Mill certainly held them as one, and was barely conscious that there was a distinction. And, even for Bentham himself, they were linked inextricably in the practical work of politics. But in reality their unity applied only to the work of destruction. The principle of utility was an excellent house-breaker of obsolete doctrines and institutions; but there was nothing in it that forbade the erection of a new building on the vacant site. And, in law at any rate, Bentham's message was constructive as well as critical.

The doctrine of *laissez-faire* has really quite a different origin, and one that is fatally exposed to

Bentham's favourite form of attack. For it rests on the assumption of an inherent and natural harmony which makes the interest of each man coincide in reality with the interest of all. What assumption could in truth be more mystical, or less capable of demonstration from the facts? Adam Smith's proclamation that, if men but follow their own economic interests, an invisible hand will guide them to realise also the interest of Society, is precisely what Bentham called the Rights of Man —"simple nonsense"—or even, as it was expounded by many of the Benthamite economists, "nonsense on stilts." But Bentham himself, preoccupied with the work of destruction, and exaggerating the good that would be let loose if only man-made evils could be done away with, could not see this. He thought he had escaped from mysticism and metaphysical nonsense. But he had one foot in mysticism himself, for he assumed that each man's enlightened selfishness would work out to the good of all; and his followers, such as James Mill, speedily plunged in up to the neck.

In this I have said nothing of the apparent falsity of the Utilitarian psychology, or of the powerful support which it gave to that other figment of the dismal science—the "economic man." Bentham's psychology might be false, and yet on the whole sound enough as a political guide. For politics is concerned mainly with the making of laws, and the chief object of law-making should

be the promotion of human happiness and the prevention of human misery. Benthamism was, in this particular, far sounder as a guide to political than to economic conduct ; for economics has to do largely with human motives, and can hardly hope to give right counsel if it begins by getting human motives in a hopelessly wrong perspective.

The "economic man," however, was made plausible not so much by the Utilitarian psychology —for the pursuit of happiness is by no means the same thing as the pursuit of gain—as by the mystical assumption of an invisible hand that made the interest of each coincide with that of all. For the vogue of this doctrine Adam Smith, rather than the Utilitarians, was primarily responsible ; and from him it passed, as an almost unquestioned assumption, into orthodox economic thought. It is essentially the old doctrine of the Creator's beneficence restated in non-theological terms. Behind it is the old conception of the natural law as God's law, now identified anew with the law of reason. From this doctrine the economists derive their magistral attitude. As interpreters of the law of nature and reason they are in a position to give not merely advice, but positive commands. Even Malthus, who is less sure than the others that the laws of the universe are all on the side of progress, conceives humanity as having been saved from destruction by the "natural checks" upon the growth of population—war, pestilence and famine

—and accordingly throws at least a hesitant sanction of divine beneficence round the nakedness of human suffering. Adam Smith, who was no utilitarian in philosophy, whatever he may have been in economics, was no doubt conscious that his appeal to the invisible hand involved an intuitive rather than an experimental judgment. The later Benthamites contrived to reconcile a supreme scorn for "natural" rights with a childlike faith in a "natural" economic harmony.

Benthamism, viewed in retrospect, deserves far more credit for what was latent in it than for its ostensible doctrines. In especial, the "greatest happiness" principle, as Bentham stated it, had the power to recall the world sharply from one of the eighteenth century's most persistent delusions. From Hutcheson to Paley, the forerunners of Utilitarianism declared, almost with one voice, that happiness was an inward principle, hardly dependent at all on men's external conditions, and independent especially of differences of wealth and rank. The rich man in his castle, they all declared, had no better chance of happiness than the poor man at his gate. Poverty was therefore no hardship; and, on strictly utilitarian principles, the case against inequality crumbled. Virtue, and not material fortune, was the key to happiness.

Bentham's "pushpin is as good as poetry," true or untrue, swept this cant away. Happiness, said Bentham, is made up of pleasures: there is no

essential difference. One pleasure may be greater than another ; but pleasure is a direct individual experience, and each man must be judge of his own. It is mere cant to prescribe to others what they ought to feel. By the time John Stuart Mill sought to retract this tenet of his masters, it had done its work—the most valuable work of providing the world, if not with a sound philosophy, at least with an excellent working basis for democratic institutions. In this aspect of the "greatest happiness" principle lurks, in little, the whole case for social reform and the banishment of poverty from the world.

Unhappily, the counters with which the economists played their game were not really human pains and pleasures, though they masqueraded as these, but the *sous comptants* of economic exchange. The economists had to turn Bentham's calculus into monetary terms : so much pleasure was to be worth sixpence, and so much of the pain, or disutility, of labour was to be compensated with half a crown. What this act of transmutation ignored, even when the principle of "diminishing utility" was plainly recognised, was the patent fact that an equal sum of money does not represent the same value, in pleasure or pain, to the rich man and to the poor. The rich man who offers £1 for a commodity may be offering what is of far less value to him than the poor man's offer of a mere penny represents. This difference is vital ; but unless

it is ignored the entire hedonistic calculus assumed to underlie the laws of supply and demand is cut away. Economic laws are stripped of their ethical sanction ; and the law of value becomes a mere statement of fact, and not a declaration of right. But this it took the Benthamite economists long to see : even their last direct inheritor, John Stuart Mill, spent his life struggling to break the chains that bound him to his teachers. And, thereafter, in Jevons, economic hedonism, based on the old confusion, took unfortunately a new lease of life.

Bentham was almost the first English political theorist who would not be at the pains of trying to write well. Not all his predecessors had succeeded ; but all had tried. But literary style was one of the obsolete superstitions that Bentham was eager to throw away. Economics was soon to suffer the same fate. Adam Smith was so good a stylist, and so much a humanist, as to ease the path of the new "science" into the minds of eighteenth-century gentlemen who admired polite letters and scorned the vulgar ; and probably his style was largely responsible for the ready acceptance of his doctrine by the politicians of his day. Malthus, too, was no mean stylist. But Ricardo wrote as vilely as Smith wrote well ; and with him the tradition of vile writing laid on the economists a grip that it has seldom since relaxed. Mill, almost alone among the Victorian economists, can claim to be

considered not only for what he said, but also for the manner of its saying. And even Mill's style is no more than clear and clean and adequate—though that, in technical writing, is certainly much. In form, as well as in content, the Political Economy of the early nineteenth century for the most part fully deserved its name of the dismal science. Nor did most of the Socialists who attempted to answer the Ricardians and Benthamites write better than their opponents.

There is, however, among the Socialists, one outstanding figure who, with little claim to literary merit, at least relieves the general gloom. Robert Owen goes back in his general philosophy to Godwin, denying with him the doctrine of human responsibility, which had been applied to convict men of causing their own misery, and so to excuse society from the task of curing it. "Man's character," Owen never wearies of saying, "is made for him and not by him." He is the creature of upbringing and environment ; and, if he is as poor and mean-motived a thing as the economists make out, that is because society has surrounded him with influences that have made him poor and mean. Alter the environment, and you will alter the man with it. The road to Godwin's natural Utopia thus lies, for Owen, as for Godwin, through education ; but this education is far more widely conceived. It includes the entire social environment, and involves a different social structure, need-

ing more and not less of collective action as man advances towards purer intellectual enlightenment. Godwin's road ends in Anarchism : Owen's leads to the Co-operative Commonwealth.

Theoretically, Owen is as rationalistic as Godwin ; but in practice he comes near to just that constructive interpretation of Benthamism which the Benthamites had missed. They were set on removing causes of pain, and leaving the economic harmony to do the rest. Owen saw that the conditions of economic harmony had to be created by positive social action. He wanted Factory Acts, a humane and creative substitute for the Poor Laws, an education very differently conceived from the cheap and nasty monitorial system of the Benthamites' favourite, Lancaster. He created, at New Lanark, the one factory of the era of the Industrial Revolution on which it is legitimate to look back with pride. And it is pleasant to remember that among his abettors in this enterprise—albeit only as a sleeping partner—was Jeremy Bentham himself.

Owen's social writings are, at his aged and apocalyptic worst, sheerly unreadable. At his younger best, their literary merits are but clarity and directness of statement. The *New View of Society* is the best of them, save his unfinished *Autobiography* ; and that owes its merit not to style but to matter. Many read Owen for what he had to say, none for how he said it. And this helps, doubtless, to account for the sheer neglect

into which his writings fell when the day of his immediate influence was over. The rise of modern Socialism has brought him back to fame ; but he is known to-day rather by what he did than by what he wrote.

When Benthamism and Ricardianism married, they had, with their combined empires, the world at their feet. Even a twisted Titan like Carlyle, crying from his rock of pain, could do no more than mutter inarticulate protest against their authority. What Carlyle's social philosophy was, in any positive sense, who shall say ? Anguish does not make for clear utterance, or orderly and coherent thought. Against the all-power of the " cash nexus " Carlyle conjures up regiment after regiment of shadows, but not one tangible and embodied principle of action. The Chartists are right to protest, but wrong in all they claim. Reform is " Shooting Niagara." The new Poor Law is a monstrous monument of inhumanity ; but laudation of the good old days of the Abbot of Saint Edmundsbury is hardly an alternative programme. Nor is the theme of *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, with its pathetic cry for a saviour of society. There was need of great men in the England of the Reform Act and the Chartist agitation ; but great men can work only within their environment, and not against it. Carlyle was crying for the moon : he wanted a different world, not a remedy for the old world's ills. And

for this reason his protest was ineffective. Men gaped at his vast, clumsy, pregnant denunciations. But they did not heed them ; for there was in them no moral that could be applied.

The other great literary figure who not only stood out against the dominant tradition, but also tried to construct an alternative system of thought, was Samuel Taylor Coleridge. We left him, in an earlier chapter, planning with a group of young enthusiasts the foundation of an ideal community on the banks of the Susquehanna. We come back to find him, in middle age, the erudite but elusive professor of a strange, metaphysical conservatism. No man now abuses the French Revolution more roundly : none is a more fixed defender of the Establishment in Church and State ; and none is more forward in his hostility to the leaders of popular disaffection. But Coleridge could never have been content with a merely instructive opposition to change : he had to justify his change of front, if not to his contemporaries, at least to his own fastidious and exacting intelligence. Accordingly, Coleridge's conservatism is a thing apart—a construction of the mind as peculiar, in its way, as *Kubla Khan*.

He begins by giving up a great deal to the Benthamites. Expediency, he grants, and not absolute reason, is the correct standard of practical political judgment. Faith in absolute reason as a practical guide has been the certain road to revolu-

tionary excess ; and it has led men also to the absurd conclusion that one type of government, derived directly from it, must be best in all times and places, without regard to conditions of climate, situation, opportunity, education or tradition. Against this view, as against all upholders of Natural Rights as the true guide to the art of legislation, Bentham, he holds, was unanswerable. Practically, Coleridge proclaims himself so far in agreement with the Utilitarians.

But at this point his view diverges sharply from theirs. Expediency is the standard of practical political judgment. But this judgment is not everything. It does not even touch the things that lie deepest in the life of society. Men have gone wrong, Coleridge believes, by confusing two things that are essentially different under the common name of the State. There is a State in the narrow sense—a piece of political machinery serving certain definite ends, of which the protection of property is by far the most important. It is to this State that the principle of utility applies. But there is also another State, underlying this governmental State, which can be at best only a very partial and incomplete expression of it ; and the purpose of this second State is the embodiment of the national idea and the national tradition. Coleridge is really drawing here, in his own idealist fashion, the vital distinction between State, as instrument of government, and community, as that

underlying associative unity that makes a State possible.

Much of Coleridge's political writing is concerned with the problem of Church and State, in the light of the struggle over the status of the National Church which centred round the claims of Catholics and Dissenters for equal political and social rights. Like Wordsworth and Southey, Coleridge, in his reaction from juvenile enthusiasm, fell back into the arms of the Church, and was thereafter apt, on all occasions, to join in the cry that the Church was in danger. But, in this case too, he had to find a justification of his own for his political attitude. There are, in his view, two Churches, as well as two States. The National Church, by law established, is an institution, equally with the State, entirely of this world. The duty of its ministers is to inculcate in their flocks civic morality and civil obedience. The Church Establishment is as secular as that astonishing Erastian Church which Rousseau had prescribed in his *Social Contract*. But underlying this secular Church is another Church, the Christian Church, whose kingdom is not of this world, related to the National Church as the ideal State is to the governmental State. The Christian Church and the ideal State dwell in the hearts and minds of men : they cannot be embodied in any merely phenomenal institution.

But, if it is essential to understand the difference between Church and State in these two forms, it

is at the peril of the people that either governmental State or National Church becomes divided from its ideal original. As ministers of governmental State or National Church, men have purely secular duties, and may be guided by pure conditions of expediency. But they must be at the same time ministers of the ideal Church and the ideal State, and responsible to a higher law. This view enables Coleridge to steer clear of Erastianism. His National Church is subject not to the governmental, but to the ideal State ; and equally his governmental State must act according to the principles of the ideal Church. Royal supremacy over the Church is thus not Erastian : the King is head of the Church not as head of the government, but in a different capacity. He symbolises the identity of the persons in which Church and State alike are embodied.

Church and State stand, moreover, for the "harmonious opposition" of two principles, the combination of which is vital to the life of society. The principle of the State is progression in wealth and personal freedom, based firmly on permanence of institutions. The principle of the Church is the moral advancement of the people, based firmly on permanence of faith.

This doctrine of Coleridge's has been outlined at some length, not because it exerted great influence at the time, but because it stands for the re-entry, big with consequences for the future, of continental

philosophy into English political thought. Coleridge anticipates T. H. Green, though he puts the idealist doctrine to a different use. He is the forerunner of Green and Bosanquet, and the "metaphysical theory of the State" which was, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, dominant in English academic thinking. But in Coleridge, as we have seen, the metaphysical view, while it is all-pervasive, is not the sole guide to political conduct. It is developed in opposition not, as later, to Benthamism, but to the upholders of the Rights of Man or the unaided light of reason.

It seems strange, to a modern reader, that in *The Friend*, where his general view is most clearly expounded, Coleridge should have directed the main brunt of his argument against Rousseau. For Rousseau profoundly influenced Kant; and Coleridge, like Hegel in Germany, based his thought chiefly on Kant's reinterpretation of Rousseau. But Coleridge's attack is quite consistent. Kant took Rousseau's General Will and turned it from a political into an ethical principle. The Categorical Imperative is little more than the General Will restated in ethical terms. And Coleridge's point was that, while the principle "So act, that you may will your action to be law universal" is the one true foundation of morality, it is the worst possible guide for political conduct. Coleridge draws a distinction between ethics and practical politics as sharp as that between the ideal and the

governmental State. I do not think he is logical in this ; for both political and moral action equally involve reference at once to standards as well as to considerations of expediency. Conduct cannot be thus split up ; and the distinctions between real and phenomenal and between ethics and politics are equally untenable. But Coleridge's view is none the less important for being wrong.

Most of the great English poets have left a high proportion of unmistakably bad verse ; but none I know of has left so high a proportion as Coleridge. It is the same with his political writing. His prose is astonishingly uneven. There are flashes of the genius of the *Ancient Mariner* ; and then there are long stretches where he writes like a minor eighteenth-century divine composing his Sunday sermon. Wordsworth, whose prose has always been unduly neglected, has a far surer touch in political prose. But Wordsworth, in politics, had also far less to say. Even Southey, in his *Essays* and his *Colloquies on Society*, wrote far better prose than is to be found in the greater part of *The Friend* or *Church and State*. But Southey had no higher flights, only a consistent literary competence.

When Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge had joined the ranks of the anti-Jacobins, there was a formidable range of literary talent arrayed against the popular cause. Burns, the singer of the Rights of Man, had died before the turn of the century ; and Blake was of the dying generation.

Shelley and Byron led for the opposition. Byron, who defended the Luddites in one of his two speeches in the House of Lords, was neither a deep thinker, like Coleridge, nor an impassioned idealist, like Shelley, nor a prophet, like Blake. But he was an extraordinarily effective satirist, who got and imparted the full savour of the Benthamite pleasure of righteous malevolence. His prefatory onslaught on Southey in *Don Juan* hits far harder than anything in Thomas Love Peacock, and still retains all its force. And *The Vision of Judgment* is, I think, the greatest piece of verse satire in the language. It is as skilful as Dryden, and a dozen times as sincere. Take this, with which the Devil greets that "old, blind, mad, helpless, weak, poor worm," George III, on his arrival at the gates of Heaven :

" 'Tis true, he was a tool from first to last
(I have the workmen safe) ; but as a tool
So let him be consumed. From out the past
Of ages, since mankind have known the rule
Of monarchs—from the bloody rolls amass'd
Of sin and slaughter—from the Cæsar's school,
Take the worst pupil ; and produce a reign
More drench'd with gore, more cumber'd with the slain.

" He ever warr'd with freedom and the free :
Nations as men, home subjects, foreign foes,
So that they utter'd the word ' Liberty ! '
Found George the Third their first opponent. Whose

History was ever stain'd as his will be
With national and individual woes ?
I grant his household abstinence : I grant
His neutral virtues, which most monarchs want ;

" I know he was a constant consort ; own
He was a decent sire, and middling lord.
All this is much, and most upon a throne ;
As temperance, if at Apicius' board,
Is more than at an anchorite's supper shown.
I grant him all the kindest can accord ;
And this was well for him, but not for those
Millions who found him what oppression chose.

" The New World shook him off ; the Old yet groans
Beneath what he and his prepared, if not
Completed : he leaves heirs on many thrones
To all his vices, without what begot
Compassion for him—his tame virtues ; drones
Who sleep, or despots who have now forgot
A lesson which shall be re-taught them, wake
Upon the thrones of earth ; but let them quake ! "

This is as forceful as the best of Shelley's political verse, and a good deal more accomplished. There is passionate anger behind it, not impairing perfect technical skill. Byron has been judged, first, by his more romantic narratives and later by his lyrics, and undervalued by posterity as he was overvalued by many of his contemporaries. He has seldom

been judged by what he did best: righteous political invective. In that, in a very different style, he ranks with Cobbett—and I, at any rate, put no one higher.

Byron, especially when he is set against Wordsworth and Coleridge, inevitably suggests Peacock, whose novels are not stories, but treasure-houses of lore and satire. But Peacock's mood is very different from Byron's. He deals not in passionate indignation, but in poking fun and sometimes contempt. Coleridge's mysticism, Shelley's idealism, Byron's romanticism, the apostasy of the Lake School pensioners (though he had a sincere admiration for Wordsworth's poetry), the vagaries of Brougham and his "Steam Intellect Society," the doings of the "paper money men," the Malthusians and the defenders of "virtual representation," all come under his censure. But he does not lay them out with a sledge-hammer: he prefers to keep them dancing with a succession of flicks of the whip. Best of all is his parable of the British Constitution, figured as the crumbling embankment that keeps the waters back from the valley of Gwaelod.

"'Decay,' said Seithenyn, 'is one thing, and danger is another. Everything that is old must decay. That the embankment is old, I am free to confess; that it is somewhat rotten in parts, I will not altogether deny; that it is any the worse for

that, I do most sturdily gainsay. It does its business well : it works well : it keeps out the water from the land, and it lets in the wine upon the High Commission of Embankment. Cupbearer, fill ! Our ancestors were wiser than we : they built it in their wisdom ; and, if we should be so rash as to try to mend it, we should only mar it.'

" ' The stonework,' said Teithrin, ' is sapped and mined : the piles are rotten, broken, and dislocated : the floodgates and sluices are leaky and creaky.'

" ' That is the beauty of it,' said Seithenyn. ' Some parts of it are rotten, and some parts of it are sound.'

" ' It is well,' said Elphin, ' that some parts are sound : it were better that all were so.'

" ' So I have heard some people say before,' said Seithenyn ; ' perverse people, blind to venerable antiquity : that very unamiable sort of people who are in the habit of indulging their reason. But I say, the parts that are rotten give elasticity to those that are sound : they give them elasticity, elasticity, elasticity. If it were all sound, it would break by its own obstinate stiffness : the soundness is checked by the rottenness, and the stiffness is balanced by the elasticity. . . . Cupbearer, fill ! It was half rotten when I was born, and that is a conclusive reason why it should be three parts rotten when I die.' "

Peacock is not every man's meat ; but for such as like social satire, and can bear more than a spice of classical allusion, he is the choicest dish on the board.

The men of letters, then, are of divided allegiance in the great upheaval which followed the French Revolution. In their view of the Industrial Revolution they are more at one. Coleridge and Southey join with Byron, Shelley and Peacock in protesting against its abuses. Coleridge's conservatism wages war as fiercely on the new commercial interest as on the Rights of Man.

" Down the river there plied, with wind and tide,
A pig with vast celerity ;
And the Devil looked wise as he saw how the while
It cut its own throat. ' There ! ' quoth he with a smile,
' Goes England's commercial prosperity.' "

Coleridge was constantly appealing from the new commercial standards of right and wrong to the standard of moral duty. He thought the dying agricultural system was the life of the nation : he hated enclosures, and paper-money, and the new factories. So, with greater circumspection, did Southey, who pleaded for social reform while he denounced social revolution. The poets who went over to the old order became conservatives, and not defenders of capitalism. Coleridge said that property was the source of social well-being ;

but he meant landed property, and not industrial or commercial capital. He had more in common with Cobbett than he liked to believe ; and he said many hard things of the Constitution and the governing class which he set out to defend.

VI

CONCLUSION

I HAD hoped, within the space of this essay—for it is no more—to bring the discussion of my subject down more nearly to the present day—to say something at least of the great Victorians, and to spare a parting word from one or two of my contemporaries. But I have almost reached my tale of words, and am but hovering on the threshold of the Victorian Age. It would take another essay as long as this to finish the task I had in mind. Perhaps I may attempt it on another occasion ; for I hate to leave a job half done. But for the time being what has been written must stand, not as even the sketch of a history of political literature —for that it was never in my mind to attempt— but rather as the suggestion of a study that will repay with interest a further pursuit.

Stopping short where I have stopped, I have been little troubled in this essay with a problem that would have beset me sorely had I gone further. Its beginnings are, indeed, clearly to be seen in the writers with whom I have been dealing in the previous section. The writers of the seventeenth century managed, as a rule, with a very scanty

paraphernalia of technical terms, and drew most that they did use from the speech of everyday life. But the nineteenth century introduced the science of jargon, as well as the jargon of science, though Bentham had already anticipated it in the eighteenth. The path of the modern writer on political or economic subjects is beset with jargon on every hand. Technological barbarism takes him captive ; for he must, to some extent, adopt the technical terms and phrases which have been made part and parcel of the tradition of his subject. If, as a literary purist, he sets out to avoid them, he only makes his task impossible. For they have become the familiar shorthand or symbolism of political and economic science. Attempts to steer clear of them involve endless periphrases, and compel the reader, instead of building on a common foundation of language, to learn a new set of usages with every book he reads.

The exact sciences, with most excuse, are most responsible for this invasion of the Goths and Vandals ; for their method demands above all classification and the use of exact terms. But the " inexacter sciences " are fain to outdo their masters, and with far less excuse. Sociology, whose very name is an offence, revels in barbarous lingo ; and the more pretentious economists are little better. Some day, perhaps, familiarity may purge away the stain of some of these barbarisms ; for languages grow, and words wax mellow with use. But there

is no justification for pushing neologism beyond the point of bare necessity. Much modern terminological pseudo-exactitude is pure bounce. It is designed not to make the inexact exact, but to make it seem so. A technical term, the coiners of this sort of currency are apt to forget, can of itself explain nothing : it can only symbolise an explanation when one has been found. It is so far useful —like the symbols and formulæ of mathematics and physical science—in order to save time and ink. We know nothing of a man merely by knowing his name ; but it is true that, when we do know him, to know his name helps us to retain and arrange our knowledge. When we do not know a man's name, but need to remember him, we often give him a nickname. Out of that necessity, indeed, names probably arose.

Some terms, then, we must use, and use exactly. But terminology may be good or bad ; and it matters a great deal that it should be good—not only because this vitally affects literary quality, but also because it affects thought. In political studies at any rate, it is indispensable to preserve the historical and associative colour of the words in which men have done their thinking in the past. This colour, hostile to exactitude like that of the physical sciences, is here an aid to thought ; for political thought can become exact only at the cost of leaving out a large part of its content. Politics, despite Herbert Spencer and the Darwinian poli-

ticians, is not a science, but an art. It must use technical terms ; but it must not become their slave.

There are modern writers who realise this. Bertrand Russell can write philosophy, and Bernard Shaw politics, without jargon. But the flood of terminology creeps up to their feet. And, unhappily, it has flowed right over the heads of most of our professors. Until well on into the nineteenth century, academic English was usually competent. Now, even the politicians do not write so badly as the professors. Modern political literature is, for the most part, far less literature than its equivalent of a hundred years ago. And this divorce, unless I have been sadly astray in my reasoning throughout this essay, cannot be good for political thinking, any more than it is good for literature. For, if I may end where I began, form and content are not two separable things, but only two aspects of the same thing.

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